FEBRUARY

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Polyhedron™

NEWSZINE

RPGA® NETWORK

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Classifieds

California: I am starting an AD&D® game club in the Malibu area. Small membership fee will be required. Call me at (213)457-7849. Ask for Sean.

California: I'm looking for players in the San Francisco Bay Area. I play the original AD&D game, MERPs, Star Wars, Star Trek, Champions, DC Heroes, and much, much more. I would like to find out how to play Space 1889 and Paranoia. For information call or write: Jeremiah Cook, 2016 San Antonia Ave., Alameda, CA 94501, or phone (510)522-4214.

Georgia: I am a 33-year-old female who recently moved to Brunswick, GA, and I can't find any gamers. I love any game, especially Dr. Who, and I am willing to learn new games. I'm also interested in science fiction and fantasy novels, flute music, and finding new penpals. Please write: Yvette Shecut, 2011 Ellis Street, Brunswick, GA 31520. I will respond to any letters.

Georgia: I'm a D&D® game DM looking for players in the North Fulton area. I also GM Pendragon if anyone is interested. There is an AD&D game DM in the area who uses the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting and DRAGONLANCE® setting. Both of us are desperate. Please call Peter Locke at (404)992-9560, or write me at 155 Truehedge Trace, Roswell, GA, 30076, or call Stephen Dmetruk at (404)642-1740 or write him at 2730 Hazy Hollow, Roswell, GA 30076.

Massachusetts: We are a group of RPG gamers looking for other gamers to join us for Saturday evening gaming sessions in the Cape Cod area. Games include: AD&D game, HeroQuest, Talisman, Paranoia, and Risk to name a few. We are also willing to try other RPG and board games. Please contact Chris, P.O. Box 138, Buzzards Bay, MA 02532.

Massachusetts: I'm a 26-year-old male player and DM with one completely novel module to play. I'm totally flexible on classes, races, and rules. I'm based in Worcester, and I'm seeking player characters of 1st through 3rd level. I'm also looking for a group to join up with. I've played in California and in Texas and can offer potential players a wide variety or can bring a truly unique perpsective to an existing game. Please write to: 486 Chandler St. Box #68, Worcester, MA 01602.

New Jersey: Attention gamers in the Delaware Valley Area. The area's Network club, the Delaware Valley Game Lords, is looking for serious gamers to help us expand our organization. Come and join the area's most diversified gaming club. For more information please contact: The Delaware Valley Game Lords, c/o Thomas F. Sullivan, 5103 Laruel Ave., Pennsauken, NJ 08109, or call (609)662-7488.

New Jersey: Established gaming club based in Southern New Jersey and Northern Delaware is in search of serious gamers. We are an evergrowing organization currently upwards of 35 members. And we are looking for RPGA™ Network members to help us expand into an official Network club. For more details contact: The Garden State Gamers Guild, c/o John J. Kozar IV, 34 Swarthmore Ave., Stratford, NJ 08084.

New Jersey: I am an avid gamer looking for others like myself to form a gaming club for Southern New Jersey. I am located in the extreme southern area of Gloucester County. So I am looking for players in Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem Counties. Gamers with experience in more than one system or those willing to try something new or different is a plus. Only serious players need apply. Interested parties please contact: James Reynolds III, 1056 S. Blackhorse Pike, Circles of Williamstown S-3, Williamstown, NJ 08094.

New York: I'm looking for players and DMs in the Staten Island area. Games include DC Heroes, MARVEL SUPER HEROES, Shadowrun, Star Trek, Chill, Pendragon, Call of Cthulhu, Star Wars, James Bond, Cyberpunk, Gangbusters, Ghostbusters, and possibly others. Please write to: Frank Troise, 1 Morgan Lane, Staten Island, New York, 10314. I am also willing to correspond with other gamers about games. Did I mention that I'm an avid comic book collector? 'Nuff said.

Pennsylvania: The Liberty Gamers of Philadelphia is looking for gamers to assist us in expanding into a Network club. We have numerous members from the Greater Philadelphia area who are veterans of myriads of game systems. If you wish to game with the best in the Delaware Valley, Please Contact: The Liberty Gamers of Philadelphia, c/o Alex Rementer, 4758 Oak Terrace, Pennsauken, NJ 08109.

Virginia: Two Dungeon Masters of the original AD&D game have a combined total of more than 20 years experience. We seek players in the Woodbridge to Fredericksburg area. Please write to: David Buddwalk, 38 Crater Lane, Stafford, VA 22554.

Wisconsin: Attention gamers in the Delavan, Darien, and Lake Geneva areas. The Double Edged Sword gaming society is looking to expand its membership. We are a non-registered club that plays the AD&D game and Car Wars. And we are willing to try other games. Contact Andy Vance at 313 S. Third St., Delavan, WI 53115, or call (414)728-6671 after 4 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, or Sunday.

General: Wanted—penpals from around the world. I am 18 years old, and I have been playing RPGs for nine years. I play and DM the D&D game, AD&D game, MERPs, and Element Masters. My favorite setting is the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign. I am also interested in the DRAGONLANCE world. Please write to: Chris Oliver, P.O. Box 225, Turin, Alberta, Canada T0K 2H0.

General: For Sale—A large number of used D&D game and AD&D game modules and accessories in good condition at very low prices. Up to 80% off. For a list send a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope to Frank Brauata, 99 South Grove St., Valley Stream, NY 11580.

General: Wanted To Buy—1. DRAGON® Magazine #5, #34, #74, or will trade. I have issues #6-#11, and #28. 2. White Dwarf #21, or will trade. I have spares of #4-#12. Contact Fabian Streeton, P.O. Box 445, Glenferrie, 3122, Australia. Phone 01-61-3459-9834 or FAX 01-61-3670-6854.

About the Cover

Artist Clyde Caldwell portrays the diabolic pirate Zhen Mirat and his captive, Cyra.

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Fresh Air

Festivals Breathe Life Into City Adventures

by Mark E. Trammell

In the crockpot of campaigns, it seems cities can be much like refried beans.

A city, if not properly administered by the game master, can become a dull, lifeless conglomerate of bar brawls, thieving gangs, and adventuring shops. A city can be a place to hang the sword while training to gain new experience levels.

But a city should be more. A city should catapult a good campaign to the highest level of entertainment. And one way to give it a nudge is by adding festivals.

In the Middle Ages, merchants and craftsmen made up the bulk of the middle class—and the cities thrived on trade. But the middle class, which kept the trade going, was also the primary source of taxation revenue. Thus, members of that class were often dispirited.

It was the festival, or fair, that breathed life into the middle class. And therefore festivals should be an integral part of fantasy city campaigns.

Getting Started

To run a festival properly, you should be familiar with how festivals originated and what purposes they served.

Festivals were often found in cities with marketplaces and temples, features that draw visitors. Temples especially provided merchants with hordes of pilgrims who had traveled far and who were in need of goods and services which they could acquire at the festivals. Merchants also traded with each other so they could take different goods back to their own homelands.

At some festivals, merchants preferred to trade exclusively with each other, disdaining selling to pilgrims. Pilgrims frequently could only offer coins for the goods.

Pilgrims and merchants were from different and often distant lands, and their money did not match. Moneychangers often charged exorbitant rates, making cash not sensible at some market-based festivals. Trading goods-for-goods was ideal.

Merchants And Craftsmen

Merchants arrived weeks ahead of time to prepare for the festivals. They came in great caravans with carts and pack animals overloaded with goods. Merchants from the same regions tended to flock together, thus making a festival similar to a World's Fair. Each country was represented and offered exotic goods, foods, and displayed their customs.

Brigands And Thieves

The trade routes were plagued with robbers. Thieves were a fact of life around festival time, and they were the main reason merchants hiked their prices on goods. Thieves caught at festival time were firmly, and often harshly, dealt with by local rulers.

Rulers And Officials

Rulers in lands where festivals were held played an important role in the success of the events—protection. It was not uncommon for rulers to offer security from thieves along the main travel routes. This protection was on occasion backed by a promise of compensation for any losses caused by bandits.

Local nobles had a big stake in the fair, as it was there that they obtained most of their luxuries—a year's worth at a time.

Fair Followers

The festival brought with it guards, moneychangers, notaries, translators, and lackeys. Notaries became important because they kept written records of trades and loans. Translators were needed for the foreign guests. And lackeys, of course, transferred goods from one merchant to another.

Entertainers of all types were also found in great numbers, and they became one of the highlights of the festivals.

Festivals And Campaigns

All festivals were important political events, as rulers took steps to keep things peaceful around fair time.

Merchants would leave one festival only to move on to another—carrying news of the previous lands and ideas with them.

Communities worked to attract the most merchants possible to their festivals. It was a point of honor to have the land's biggest and best fair.

Game Masters can take all these notions into account when conjuring up a host of fast-paced adventures for a city-based group of player characters.

See, hear, and smell what is going on at the festival. Be inspired to create grand adventures there.

Keep in mind that religion is quietly behind the whole thing. While merchants are busy bartering in the town square, devout pilgrims are engaged in worship on the other side of the city.

What would happen if two or more religious sects started a streetfight, drawing government troops, city garrisons, citizen groups, guilds, and independent parties into the brawl?

What would happen if a prominent businessman is murdered during the festival?

And there are always bandits and thieves about.

The possibilities—and the festivals—are endless.

❑

Notes From HQ

A New Contest and Conventions

This month's contest comes to us courtesy of West End Games. Get your creative juices bubbling, and maybe you'll see your efforts in print!

Torg Magic Item Contest

Throughout the realm of Aysle, magic has returned! Legendary artifacts long thought powerless are now once again capable of powerful enchantments. Ancient wands, strange talismans, crystal orbs all glow with mystic power.

The Torg Magic Item Contest lets you create your own legendary magic item, something of folktale, mythology, or from your own imagination. Tell us what it is, what it does, and some of its history. Your entry should be anywhere from 250 words to 400 words. The best magic item entered, as selected by West End Games, will be the featured magic item in a Torg adventure. All entries will receive a thank you from West End Games.

All entries should be typed and double-spaced. Computer printouts are acceptable if they can be easily read.

Deadline: March 10, 1992

Convention Policy

Members of the RPGA™ Network staff are often invited as featured guests to gaming conventions. We think that's great. We enjoy supporting conventions, running tournaments there, and putting on seminars. We have to limit our convention appearances, however, because the events take us away from the office for several days—and work piles up in the meantime. We especially limit our appearances in the summer as the GEN CON® Game Fair draws near.

Lately, we've been getting so many requests to attend conventions, that we've decided to put our guest policy in print for everyone to see.

If you want a Network staff member to attend your convention as a guest, you must provide:

* Sufficient notice. Let us know at least six months in advance if you'd like a Network staff member as a convention guest. We need the advance notice so we can determine if the convention will fit in our schedule or if we can rework our schedule to accommodate the convention. Also, don't advertise a Network staff member as a guest until that staff member gives you an acceptance in writing.

* Transportation. If the convention is within reasonable driving distance, just cover our gasoline money. If the convention is farther away, you'll need to provide a plane ticket.

* A place to stay. This does not mean sleeping space on the floor of someone's living room. If the convention is at a hotel, you'll need to provide the staff member with a hotel room. If it's at a college, provide a dormitory room or hotel room.

* Expense money. Network HQ requires that a staff member attending a convention receive a minimum of $100 for expenses. This covers food, parking fees, etc.

* Be reasonable with our work schedules. Running tournaments, offering seminars, and helping out where needed is great. We'll do those things for up to 12 hours a day.

* Feel free to ask for a specific Network staff member as a guest. We don't determine who will attend.

Conventions must meet these guidelines to have a Network guest. We do not want to make a financial profit from attending a convention. However, we don't want to take a financial loss. The RPGA Network and TSR, Inc. does not cover the expenses of its staffers who attend your conventions as guests. The inviting convention or the staffer must cover the costs. We have had to put our policy in writing to insure some uniformity in what conventions actually spend for Network guests and to let everyone know what Network staffers expect to get when invited to appear as *guests.* Other gaming professionals have similar requirements, but many also require more expense money and some charge appearance fees, so be sure to get your commitments in writing when you invite *any* guest to a convention.

Take Care,
Jean ❑

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Hearth Fiend

by William Connors

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any open fire
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5-7)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	0
MOVEMENT:	See below
HIT DICE:	Varies
THAC0:	Varies
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	Varies
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Firebolt
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Hit only by magic weapons
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	Varies
MORALE:	Elite (13-14)
XP VALUE:	Varies

Since the dawn of time, mankind has looked upon fire as a mixed blessing. It drives away the night and holds back the cold. Wild animals will not approach it, and much of civilization depends upon it. Still, there are times when the flames that have nurtured mankind from the stone age into an era of steel and magic turn upon him. Fires escape the confines of lanterns, and houses are burned to the ground. Someone reaching into a warm hearth stumbles and scorches his hand on the dancing flames within it. Often, this is just chance. Sometimes, however, a more sinister force is at work.

The hearth fiend is an evil creature from the elemental plane of fire. Similar in many ways to the water weird, it is brought into Ravenloft as an accidental side effect of certain magical spells. As soon as they arrive in the demiplane of dread, hearth fiends begin to do evil. Hearth fiends have been encountered on other planes of existence, usually unwittingly carried by adventurers escaping from Ravenloft.

A hearth fiend is found only in a source of open fire: the guttering flame of a candle, the stout radiance of a torch, the warming blaze of a campfire, and so on. Here, it is visible occasionally (5% chance if closely examined) as a malevolent face that flickers menacingly in the fire. If the creature wishes to, it can make its features obvious to all who look upon it, otherwise it can be seen only with a *detect magic, detect invisibility,* or similar spell.

Hearth fiends communicate with others of their kind through the flickering of their flames and the pops and crackles they emit. When they wish to, which is seldom, they can speak to those near them in the Common tongue of men. In such cases, their voices are sharp and crackling with hissing whispery overtones. There is a 75% chance that those who hear the voice of the hearth fiend will not recognize it as speech unless they are aware of the creature's presence.

Those who hear the whisperings of the fire and recognize that it is speaking to them can be charmed by the creature, and it is in this way that the creature begins to spread its evil. Those who are aware that the fire is magical or know of its true nature are immune to the enchanting effects of the whispers. Thus, as soon as a party of adventurers learns that a given flame is actually controlled by a hearth fiend, they become immune to its charm ability. The hearth fiend can charm only one individual at a time, so the usefulness of this power is limited.

Combat: Hearth fiends attack by releasing powerful bolts of flame from their bodies. One bolt can be fired per combat round, and the amount of damage it inflicts is based upon the size of the fire that hosts the creature (see ecology). The bolts have a range of 15 feet. A normal attack roll is made by the fiery monster when it employs this assault. Anyone struck by the flames must make a saving throw versus breath weapons. Success indicates only half damage from the attack. Failure indicates that the creature takes full damage and that some or all possessions must make saving throws versus magical fire or be destroyed. Items stored within other items need not save unless the item holding them is destroyed.

Those wishing to harm the hearth fiend by direct assault must employ magical weapons. Any non-magical item employed against the creature inflicts no damage and must save versus magical fire or be destroyed.

Magical attacks based on lightning, electricity, heat, or flames inflict no damage upon the creature. Spells that rely upon cold or ice to inflict injury cause half damage to the hearth fiend. Those spells that create water in large quantities can be used to smother the hearth fiend, inflicting 1d4 points of damage per gallon of magically created water thrown upon the creature. Non-magical water, including holy water, has no effect on the hearth fiend and may actually be burned and consumed by the creature just like any other material object that it comes into contact with.

Spells like *resist fire* and *flame walk* can be used to protect oneself from the ravages of a hearth fiend, although the creature is assumed to be composed magical fire. Spells that drive creatures back to their native planes or limit their actions (*dismiss fire elemental* or *protection from evil,* for example) affect the hearth fiend normally.

Hearth Fiend

Habitat/Society: Hearth fiends are solitary creatures that delight in causing mischief and evil. Once the monster takes up residence in a given fire, that flame cannot be extinguished by normal means. It continues to burn so long as there is fuel available. Because the magical fires of this creature can consume stone and water as easily as wood or coal, it almost always has something to consume. Hearth fiends have a taste for living flesh as a fuel source, however, and enjoy nothing more than the consumption of thrashing, screaming victims caught in their fiery embrace.

Thrice per day, the hearth fiend can release 2-12 (2d6) ember eyes. These appear as innocent embers, still smoldering from the heat of the fire, that drift out into the air. The eyes remain hot and glowing for 1d6 rounds, during which time they drift about at the speed of a walking man. The hearth fiend is able to see and hear all that comes to pass near the eyes, so it uses them to gather information about its surroundings. Ember eyes can be smothered by anything that would quench normal fire (a cup of water, etc.) or anything that robs them of their enchantment (like *dispel magic*).

In addition to their use as sensory organs, the ember eyes can ignite anything they are directed to land upon. The object in question must make a saving throw versus normal fires or begin to burn. If they land on a person, that individual must make a saving throw versus breath weapons or suffer one point of damage.

Once the embers have ignited a fire, the hearth fiend can instantly transfer itself to these new flames. This takes but one round, during which time attacks on either the new or old location can affect the creature. As a rule, a hearth fiend will be reluctant to jump from a larger fire to a smaller one, for this diminishes its power. This is, however, the only way that a hearth fiend can move about on the Prime Material Plane, so it is often forced to leap into smaller fires to escape destruction at the hands of adventurers.

As soon as a hearth fiend enters a new flame, it is fully healed of damage it might have suffered, and its hit points are rerolled based on its new size. Further, the old fire is no longer considered to be magical fire and can be extinguished normally, while the new fire now becomes enchanted.

Typically, the hearth fiend will wait for several days after entering a new fire before taking any actions that might reveal its presence to those around it. When it begins its evil doings, it typically does so by whispering to those who are not likely to guess at its origins: a young child, a bar maid, or a dim-witted bully.

It begins to promise things to this person in exchange for their help in spreading its evil. At first, the promises are innocent and even helpful *"I will keep your inn warm and brightly lit..."* and the demands minimal *"...if only you will bring me some tasty yew to feed upon."*

As time goes on, and the creature begins to acquire the trust and friendship of the fire's tender, the promises become more insidious and the demands greater. It might promise never to burn the evening meal, or even the family children, in exchange for a small animal being tossed into it once per month. Further, because the fire can see many things with its ember eyes that the tender cannot, it will begin to offer disturbing news. The intent of its efforts is to goad the person it speaks to into helping the hearth fire do more evil deeds. It might reveal to a housewife whose fireplace it inhabits that her husband has been having an affair with the serving girl. Of course, the fire will be only too happy to burn the girl's face, scaring her for life, the next time she comes near it. Because of the cruel nature of the fire, there may not have been any actual romance between the master of the house and his servant, but the wife may never learn that.

Eventually, the hearth fiend will demand great sacrifices from its host—perhaps intelligent beings lured near to it so that it can lash out at them with its firebolts or the transportation of its ember eyes to places where they will ignite and allow the creature potential refuge. Often, it will cloak these requests in terms that will make them pleasing to the person it has charmed. For example, it might ask to have one of its embers transported to the hearth of a neighbor who has offended its tender. Once there, it vows to destroy the house, driving the inhabitants out and forcing them to seek a new home elsewhere. In actuality, of course, the creature will see to it that the neighbors are unable to escape the flames that engulf their home so that it may delight in the taste of their seared flesh.

Ecology: Whenever a wizard or priest employs a fire-based spell in Ravenloft, there is a 1% chance per level of the spell that the spell will cause a hearth fiend to appear. The creature will instantly be drawn into the nearest source of nonmagical fire, which it will enter. The power of the creature is based wholly upon the size of the fire that it inhabits, as indicated on the following chart:

Fire	HD	THAC0	Firebolt	XP Value
Candle or lamp	1	19	1d4	120
Torch or cooking fire	3	17	2d4	270
Campfire or fireplace	5	15	3d4	650
Large hearth	7	13	4d4	1,400
Bonfire	9	11	5d4	3,000
Burning house	11	9	6d4	5,000
Burning mansion	13	7	7d4	7,000
Burning fort	15	5	8d4	9,000
Forest fire	17	3	9d4	11,000

On their native plane, hearth fiends are lesser creatures. They drift about, always at the mercy of even the most minor inhabitants of the elemental plane of fire. They only thing that makes them unique and potent in any way is their ability to sense the use of magic that draws upon the elemental fire of their home dimension. Whenever a hearth fiend senses such a spell, it will latch on to the enchantment and leave behind the elemental plane of fire.

Once on the prime material plane, a hearth fiend is more powerful. Its fiery nature makes it dangerous and its intelligence makes it cunning enough to survive. Thus, hearth fiends are greatly reluctant to return to their plane of origin. If confronted with the possibility of banishment from the prime material plane, they will be more than willing to bargain and haggle for a chance to remain. Of course, they will lie and deceive those they must deal with in any way possible, planning all the while to destroy them at the earliest opportunity.

Just as the hearth fiend is drawn into the prime material plane by magic, so, too, can it be used to foster magic. It is known that Azalin of Darkon once harnessed the power of several of these creatures in a forge that is said to have burned hotter than any known before. Of course, in order to fuel the forge he was forced to cast living people, usually criminals from his dungeons and foolhardy adventurers, into it. However, this effort was rewarded with a device that proved unusually suited to the creation of magical items. There are those who say that each and every one of his dreaded Kargat vampires is armed with a weapon forged in the flames of this evil device. The means by which Azalin built this forge and contained the elemental creatures are unknown, but it is certain that the darkest of dark magics was involved.

Iron Hands, Captive Hearts

Zhen Mirat And The Fatal Visionaries

by Joe Littrell

Imperial Communique #28475.53f
To: Lord Darth Vader
From: Major Herrit, Imperial Intelligence
Regarding: Zhen Mirat, Wanted For Questioning Regarding Acts of Piracy and Crimes Against the Empire.

Lord Vader:

I have reviewed the reports on the pirate Zhen Mirat and his crew of what only can be described as cutthroats. They are wanted in connection with the looting and destruction of two bulk freighters belonging to the Corporate Sector Authority; four light freighters belonging to independent operators; and three (confirmed) and four (unconfirmed) Rebel cargo ships.

Mirat operates a modified Corellian KS-500 Spaceways Transport light freighter known as the Fatal Vision. *The* Vision *is a high-performance transport armed with a combination of laser and ion cannons and concussion missiles.*

Mirat himself is an enigmatic individual. While making no attempt to conceal his past, he has apparently cut all ties with his family (see communique addendum #3a), blocking that as an avenue for use in negotiations for his services.

After careful review of the known facts, I must agree with your conclusions, Lord Vader. Zhen Mirat and his group of pirates have the potential to be utilized to great effect by the Empire, possibly bargaining for their services in exchange for restricted technology and by prohibiting their "activities" to Rebel and smuggler crafts and the odd free-trader.

For additional information, see Imperial Files 137476.1d, 6345.21, 23762.8c, and 8236.4e.

Zhen Mirat

Template: Alien Student Of The Force

Height: 1.75 m
Sex: Male
Hair/Eyes: White/Pink

Dexterity 2D+1
Melee Parry 3D+2
Melee 4D

Perception 2D+1
Bargain 3D
Command 4D+1

Knowledge 3D+1
Alien Races 4D+1
Cultures 4D
Languages 4D+2

Strength 3D+2

Mechanical 2D
Beast Riding 3D+1

Technical 2D

Force Skills
Control: 5D
Sense: 4D
Alter: 4D

Force Points: 4

Force Powers: *Control pain, remain conscious, accelerate healing, contort/escape, detoxify poison, absorb/dissipate energy, receptive telepathy, truth tell, telekineses, magnify senses, life sense, projective telepathy, inflict pain, injure/kill, telekinetic kill, affect mind*

Equipment: Hold-out blaster (damage 3D+1), knife (damage 4D), sword (damage 4D+1), protective vest (armor code +2), high quality space suit, comlink, chronometer, pocket computer

Quote: "You'll do things my way—one way or another."

Zhen Mirat is an albino, with parchment white skin, close-cropped white hair, and pink eyes. Slight of build, Mirat has slender fingers. He dresses in tailored white pants and jackets.

Born to a family of moisture farmers on the desert planet of Tatooine, Zhen grew up lonely and bitter. His physical differences made the heat from the planet's twin suns unbearable and often kept him indoors away from his siblings. The young Zhen turned to his books, and then inward to himself, discovering the ease with which he could use the Force's darker powers to bend the wills of those around him.

Eventually, Zhen tired of his reclusive life and set out to see the galaxy, using his fledgling powers to secure passage on a freighter stopped at the Mos Eisley spaceport. Zhen traveled throughout space for a time, studying how others made their livings and dabbling in various livelihoods.

After some thought, Mirat decided the violent, anti-social lifestyle of a pirate fit him the best. He gathered a group of hand-picked operatives, then secured a ship by kidnapping the family of Vazan Felix and holding them for ransom in exchange for a vessel, *Tine's Future.* At Zhen's orders, the ship's name was changed to *The Fatal Vision.* Zhen still holds Felix's wife and daughter, using them as leverage to gain Felix's services.

Despite his cultured demeanor, Zhen Mirat is a ruthless, sadistic man who is prone to fits of violence. In battle, he enjoys picking a weaker target and toying with him, especially a target in a position of authority.

Chanchaz Iryt

Template: Heavyworlder

Height: 1.1 m
Sex: Male
Hair/Eyes: Brown/Brown

Dexterity 1D+1
Blaster 3D+1
Grenade 4D+1
Heavy Weapons 5D

Perception 2D+1

Knowledge 2D
Technology 3D

Strength 5D+1
Brawling 6D+2
Lifting 8D
Stamina 7D

Mechanical 3D+1
Repulsorlift Op 4D+2
Starship Gunnery 3D+2

Technical 2D
Repulsorlift Rep 3D+1

Equipment: Gaderfii (damage 6D+1), five grenades (damage 5D), protective vest (armor code +1), exposure suit (general), comlink

Quote: "So . . . who's going to be the first one to die?"

Chanchaz is Mirat's chief lieutenant. He is an ex-mercenary of great strength and no small intellect. Chanchaz finds a distinct pleasure in his position, that of Mirat's chief bonebreaker and yes-man.

Chanchaz Iryt has his race's short stature and dense structure, attributes caused by the high gravity of his home planet. He also possesses the characteristic short limbs and flat face of his people. Iryt prefers clothing that advertises his strength and attitude—leather garments with studs and spikes.

Chanchaz was born on Kaump III and spent his days growing up learning all he could about repulsorlift mechanics. His nights were devoted to learning how to brawl and bully in Kaump's rowdier night spots.

Iryt quickly decided he was destined for more than working on engines and rolling drunks and lost tourists for drink money. After a series of highly lucrative (and highly publicized) robberies in the rich section of town, Iryt left Kaump III on a luxury liner bound for Bespin.

It was in the Cloud City that he met Zhen Marit. Marit enjoyed Iryt's violent decadence, and the strongman respected Marit's ruthless ambition. The two soon formed a criminal partnership which was the core of Marit's group of pirates.

Iryt follows his own philosophy of "hedonism by force"—if he does not take what he enjoys, there is no enjoyment in the task. In combat, he is a threshing machine, delighting in mass slaughter.

Huggtar

Template: Gamorrean

Height: 1.95 m
Sex: Male
Hair/Eyes: None/Brown

Dexterity 4D+1 **Perception** 3D
Brawling Parry 6D
Dodge 4D+2
Melee Parry 5D+1
Melee 6D+1

Knowledge 2D **Strength 5D+1**
Brawling 7D
Lifting 6D
Stamina 6D

Mechanical 1D+1 **Technical 2D**
Medicine 2D+1

Equipment: Vibroaxe (damage 7D+1), blaster pistol (damage 4D), two vibroblades (damage 6D+1 each), protective vest (armor code +2), two medpacs

Quote: "I'll try not to hurt you as much as possible." (Translated from the Gamorrese.)

Huggtar is Marit's other "muscle." The Gamorrean is of almost stereotypical dimensions. Although he has had some small fame on the gladiatorial circuit, there is nothing particularly spectacular about him—just one more Gamorrean thug serving a vicious criminal.

Huggtar is different than the majority of Gamorreans, although this difference usually goes unnoticed by members of other races. Huggtar is clean (for a Gamorrean anyway).

He wears the standard battle dress of his race, with the addition of an armored chestplate that looks suspiciously similar to the front chestplate of a scout stormtrooper's armor.

Huggtar grew up in a traditional family on Gamorr, meaning he had participated in three different clanwars by the time he was eight Standard years old.

Eventually, Huggtar's family sold the youth's contract to Tysys Ryx, a Twi'lek who managed pit fighters in the quasi-legal "blood arena" circuit. It was there Huggtar discovered his natural talent for fighting. However, the Gamorrean also learned the basics of first aid while fighting on the circuit, and he discovered that he enjoyed healing more than harming.

His contract was bought by Zhen Mirat, who had watched him fight in the pits on Ryloth. Mirat knew he could use the pig-like alien's strength in his "operations."

Huggtar is a being who, in contrast with Chanchaz Iryt's love of inflicting pain, fights because he knows little else. If offered another alternative, such as learning a trade—especially one dealing with medicine—the Gamorrean would jump at the chance. Mirat, however, would object quite violently to such a move.

Vazan Felix

Template: Tramp Freighter Captain

Height: 1.68 m
Sex: Male
Hair/Eyes: Blond/Blue

Dexterity 2D+2 **Perception** 3D+2
Blaster 3D+2
Dodge 4D+2

Knowledge 3D+1 **Strength 2D**
Bureaucracy 4D+2
Planetary Systems 4D+2

Mechanical 3D **Technical 3D+1**
Astrogation 4D
Starship Piloting 5D+1
Starship Shields 3D+2
Comp. Prog/Rep 4D+1
Starship Rep 5D

Force Points: 2

Equipment: Knife (damage 2D+1), stun pistol (damage 3D, stun damage only), hold-out blaster (damage 3D+1), high quality space suit, computer tool kit, vehicle tool kit, comlink, chronometer

Quote: "So what do you know about . . . the Force?"

For the past six months, Vazan has been sporting at least three days' growth of beard on his handsome face. He usually dresses in rumpled and dirty outfits and projects a desperate, frantic appearance.

Vazan Felix was one of the most respectable and likeable free-traders in the spaceways. Honest to a fault, Felix borrowed the money to pay for his ship through legal channels and made his payments on time and in full. The presence of his wife, Cyra, and his daughter, Tine, accounted for his cheerfulness on his travels, and the family was well received any time they made planetfall.

Then six months ago Felix's wife and daughter disappeared. Zhen Mirat met with Felix the next day, claiming he kidnapped Felix's family, and their ransom was to be Felix's ship, *Tine's Future*—now called *The Fatal Vision.* Felix turned the ship over to the criminal with minimal qualms, but soon found that Mirat had no intention of turning Felix's family free.

The Tattooinian criminal found that Felix could be easily manipulated by threats of harm to his family. Those threats forced Felix to continue to operate *Tine's Future,* obeying the pirate's every command. Felix fears searching for his wife and daughter, believing that Mirat would detect his attempts through use of the Force.

Felix has been through six months of mental torture, and the days have be-

gun to wear on him. Still, the thoughts of being reunited with his family have kept him sane, and his hatred for Mirat has kept him strong. His hope lies in other spacefaring beings who use the Force for good. He longs to find these beings and call on them to defeat the madman who holds the lives of his loved ones in the balance.

In battle, Felix uses his stun pistol almost exclusively. He fights with his other weapons only when his life seems in imminent danger.

Kyrotech Blademaster X-260

Template: Assassin Droid

Height: 1.9 m

Dexterity 3D+1
Dodge 4D
Melee 4D

Perception 3D
Search 5D

Knowledge 2D

Strength 4D
Lifting 5D

Mechanical 2D

Technical 2D

Equipment: Blaster pistol (damage 4D), magnablade propellor (damage 3D+1), vibroblade (5D+2), sonar, comlink

Quote: None. X-260 is not equipped with speech.

X is a fully-articulated, polished chrome humaniform droid, slim and graceful. His weapons magnetically attach to his outer casing and are available for instant access. When activated, X's optical sensors glow a deep fluorescent green.

X was gathering dust in a Kyrotech warehouse when he was discovered by a spaceport worker who thought selling the droid would bring him some quick credits. Almost as soon as word of the war droid reached the black market, Mirat snatched X up and had it reprogrammed for his own use.

X has little self awareness, although it is not unknown for war droids to establish a personality over time. His sub-programming does not allow him to act against the interests of the Kyrotech Corporate Combine, and any adversary who learns of this weakness will find it useful in combat against the droid.

In combat, X is an efficient killer, dealing death gracefully and with a minimum amount of effort.

The Fatal Vision

Type: Modified Stock Light Freighter
Length: 28.3 meters
Crew: 2
Passengers: 6
Cargo Capacity: 70 tons
Consumables: 2 months
Hyperdrive Multiplier: x1
Navigational Computer: Yes
Hyperdrive Backup: Yes
Sublight Speed: 3D
Maneuverability: 1D
Hull: 5D
Weapons: Two Heavy Laser Cannons (fire separately)
Fire Control: 2D
Damage: 5D
One Medium Ion Cannon
Fire Control: 2D
Ionization Damage: 3D
Two Concussion Missiles
Fire Control: 1D
Damage: 8D
Shields: 2D

Adventures With The Fatal Visionaries

There are many ways to introduce the Fatal Visionaries to a group of Star Wars player characters. Several possibilities are listed below, deliberately left open-ended to allow the Game Master freedom with the scenarios.

1. S.O.S. This is the traditional players-answer-distress-call-defeat-villain-who-then-vows-vengeance-before-escaping scenario. This will tease the PCs with Zhen Mirat and company.

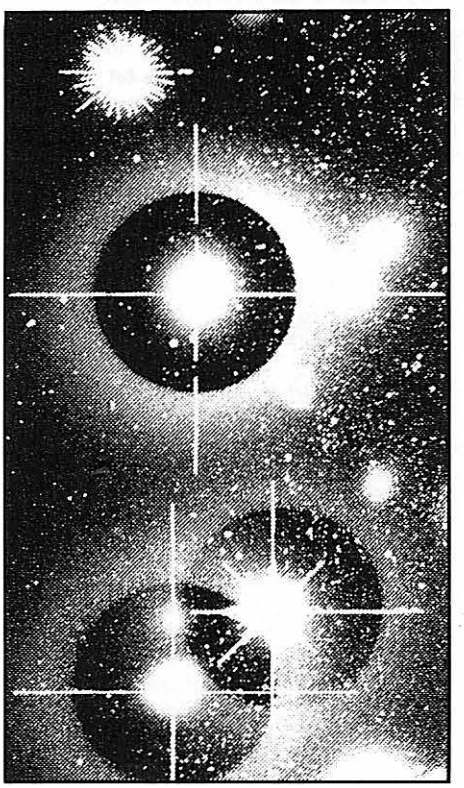
2. Engine Trouble The heroes are informed of a secret rendezvous between Imperial agents and an unknown pirate group—apparently involving the exchange of restricted technology. The pirates, of course, are the Fatal Visionaries, and the technology is a hyperdrive system which will reduce the *Fatal Vision's* hyperdrive multiplier to ×½. The PCs will have the challenge of keeping the drive system from falling into the Visionaries' hands—while avoiding being lasered by the pirates and Imperials.

3. Finders of Lost Loves Rebel player characters are summoned to the headquarters of their local Rebellion leader, a Minor Jedi. Present during the meeting is Vazan Felix, who explains his dilemma. The PCs are assigned to search for his wife and daughter, as once his family is found, Felix will be free to help the Rebellion destroy the Fatal Visionaries from within.

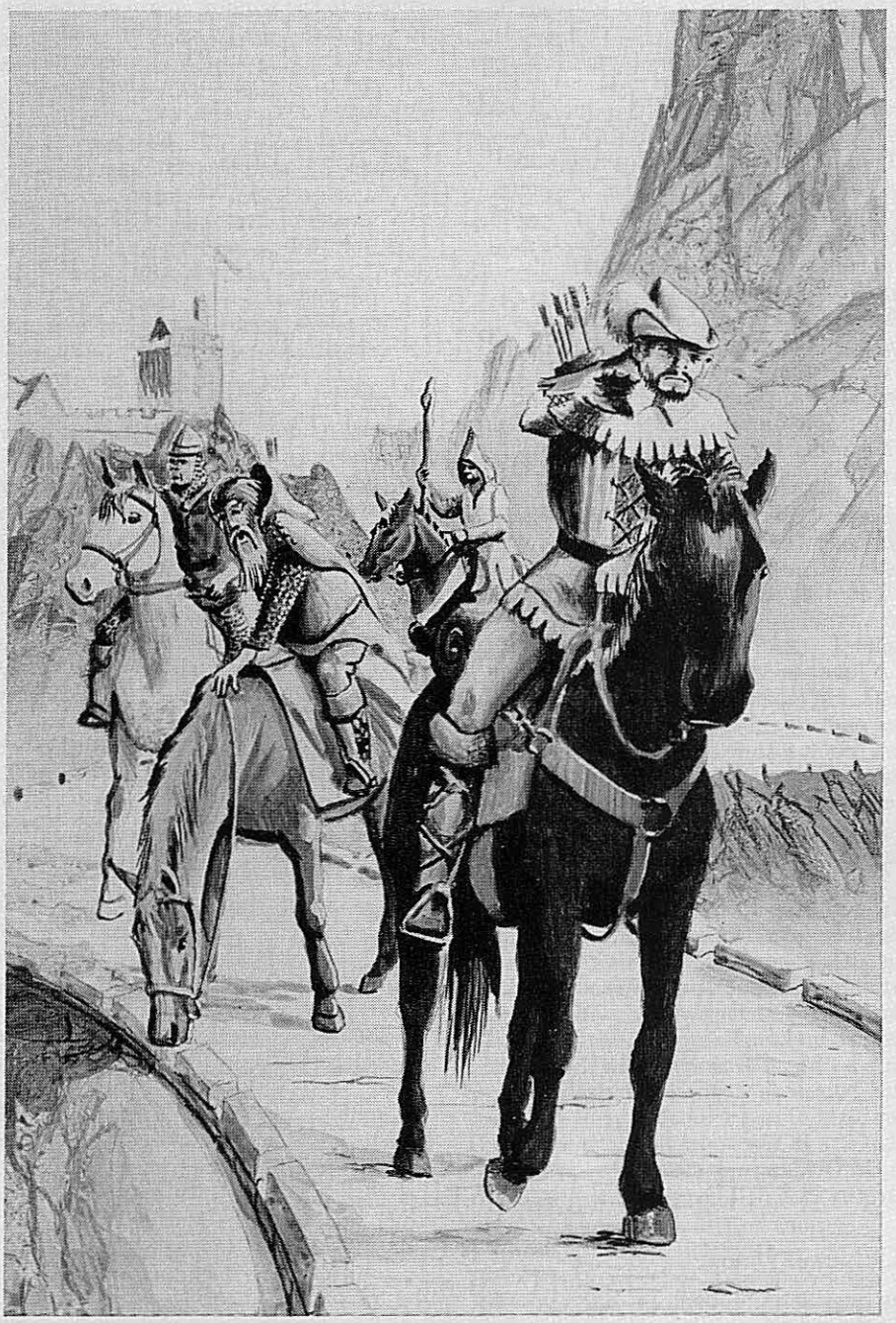
The PCs must use detective work to trace Mirat's travels back to the time of Cyra and Tine's disappearance, or they must rely on Jedi skills to locate the pair. Cyra and Tine are currently in hibernation trances in a cave deep in the Tatooine desert. They are tended by a MD-5 series medical droid and defended by a complex system of pitfalls, defense droids, and automated laser defenses.

Once the PCs have rescued Felix's family, they will find another obstacle in their way. Felix will not believe the characters when they report their success. Felix does not remember asking the Rebels for help. After the characters left, Felix had the Minor Jedi Rebel leader wipe the memory of the transaction to keep the knowledge from Mirat.

Player characters can expect a confrontation with the rest of the Fatal Visionaries, most likely a battle to the death. There is a chance Huggtar might change sides when he discovers Felix was forced to aid Mirat. In addition, the characters may discover the connection between X and Kyrotech. ❑



Hero



An AD&D® 2nd Edition Game Adventure for 4–7 Characters, Levels 7–9

Illustration by Kevin Ward

by Don Bingle and Jay Tummelson

Introduction

This scenario is designed for use with the accompanying player characters. DMs can substitute player characters of similar levels from their own campaigns. If you use your own PCs, you'll find it helpful to include the Sonnet character as an NPC. The scenario begins when the PCs arrive at an inn after successfully completing an adventure. They are happy, but tired and looking forward to a good night's rest in a warm bed. Their wish is not to be granted, however, as each of them experiences a dream about a maiden. The maiden is in a predicament, and when she sings a song the PCs learn she is waiting for a hero to rescue her.

> Weary grins appear on your faces at first sight of the inn. It has been four and twenty days since you last slept in a warm bed with clean, fresh sheets. It has, in fact, been four and twenty days since you slept in a bed. Your lot has been the damp, hard stone pathways of a foreboding and evil-infested ruin.
>
> You arrive at the inn just as the sunset reaches its most spectacular moment. A neatly carved sign indicates that there are rooms available for rent. The mixed smells of beef stew and fine spirits meander out the open window from the attached tavern. What do you do?

SCENE 1: Time to Relax

Miller's inn and tavern are obviously quality establishments—not haughty or fancy, but still above the average roadside establishment. The inn stands along a major trading route between this province and the adjacent kingdom. For seven silver a night, a patron can have a room, breakfast, clean sheets, and a hot bath. A bunk in a barracks can be had for two silver. The innkeeper, Damar Miller, is a large, friendly, bear of a man. He is sharp, but honest, and he is willing to give fair value for what he is paid. He seeks to please his customers without being obsequious, booming his greetings in a loud, gravelly voice. The PCs may make whatever arrangements they would like for dinner, refreshments, and rooms.

Although the PCs passed many groups of travelers on the road, the inn is not too crowded. If the PCs inquire, Damar says: "Well, the merchant trade seems to be falling off somewhat. And the peasant travelers sleep alongside the road now, it being good weather season. Anyway, you folks look too weary to want to listen to my business problems."

The bartender is Bleke, a stout, quiet man who goes about his business with precision and efficiency. The quality of the ale, wine, and other spirits is generally quite good. The management does not encourage over-drinking; they offer no cheap specials and do not serve obviously intoxicated patrons. Bleke is a capable bouncer. His assistant is his daughter, Melony.

Melony is bright and pretty, with a mischievous grin. She deftly handles all of the customers, bringing drinks and food, clearing glasses and plates, and collecting generous tips for her efforts.

The other patrons of the tavern include:

- Two merchants huddled at a corner table negotiating price and terms on an order of fine cloths.
- Three local farm youths who spend most of their time trying to impress Melony.
- A lone traveler in a heavy, gray cloak. He has a foul expression on his face and is drinking strong spirits a slow sip at a time. This fellow does not wish to converse, but, if pressed, he mutters something about not being able to save his business. Then he scowls and turns back to his spirits.
- Two hunters (actually both thieves) who converse about the scarcity of game and keep an eye open for any easy pickings. They won't try anything hard or dangerous, as they have already paid for their rooms for the night and don't want to make a hasty exit. If the PCs start a fight, the thieves join the other side, hoping for a chance to grab some loot if the PCs are defeated.

Let the PCs role play a bit, but don't let things drag out too much. Eventually, the PCs will go to bed.

SCENE 2: Michelle's Ode

During the night, each PC has a dream. The dreamers see a beautiful woman (actually Princess Michelle, daughter of King Slaciswenz of the neighboring province of Skittledom) in a fine silk dress. She is pacing nervously in a small, dimmed room that has a bed, dressing table, washstand, and chair. Michelle looks like Sonnett's "dream girl." She looks anxiously out the narrow window next to the bed, looks again, then begins pacing anew, the beat of her footsteps fades into the beat of music. Anxious, but unafraid, she rushes to the window again and begins to sing. Read the lyrics below aloud once to the players. They should not be allowed to take any notes, since their characters are asleep.

Where have all the good men gone?
And where are all the gods?
Where's the street-wise Hercules
To fight the rising odds?
Isn't there a white knight upon a fiery steed?
Late at night I toss and turn and dream of what I need.

Chorus

I need a hero.
I'm holding out for a hero 'till the end of the night.
He's gotta be strong
And he's gotta be fast
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight.
I need a hero.
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light.
He's gotta be sure
And it's gotta be soon
And he's gotta be larger than life.

Somewhere after midnight
In my wildest fantasy,
Somewhere just beyond my reach
There's someone reaching back for me,
Racing on the thunder and rising with the heat.
It's gonna take a superman to sweep me off my feet.

(Chorus)

Upon where the mountains meet the heavens above
Out where the lightning splits the sea
I would swear that there's someone somewhere
Watching me.
Through the wind and the chill and the rain
And the storm and the flood.
I can feel his approach
Like a fire in my blood

(Chorus)

Lyrics by Dean Pitchford and Jim Steinman; "HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO" — Copyright © 1984 by Ensign Music Corporation.

No doubt the PCs will be intrigued by the dream. Give them nothing else to do and they will realize this is their next quest and begin asking people at the inn about the damsel in distress. Such inquiries reveal the following:

- The maiden in the dream matches the description of Princess Michelle, the daughter of the ruler of the neighboring province of Skittledom. Michelle is rumored to be held prisoner by a powerful, evil mage named Rann Dohm who lives in the Tower of Chaos. The maiden's father, good King Slaciswenz, had decreed that the evil mage be banished from the province for committing various crimes involving random violence and chaos in the marketplace and inciting others to anarchy, assassination, theft, and miscellaneous mischief. Rann Dohm, his voice dripping with venom, had replied that he would gladly leave Slaciswenz' pitiful excuse for a kingdom if only the King would give him the hand of his daughter, Michelle, in marriage. The King coolly replied that his daughter would marry only by her own choice. Ran Dohm, in a terrible fit of rage and wrathful retribution, magically cursed both the King and his kingdom by declaring that if Michelle is not married by her next birthday, her 21st, both the King and the kingdom would be consumed by fire and brimstone. When the royal courtiers laughed at the curse, Rann Dohm declared that to prove the power of his curses both the King and the lands of the kingdom would immediately begin to wither and grow weak. Just as Rann Dohm finished speaking such words, the King fainted. In the ensuing commotion, Rann Dohm kidnapped Michelle.
- It is rumored that Rann Dohm holds Michelle in the Tower of Chaos, deep in the mountains by the sea at the outer reaches of the kingdom. A dark foreboding presence seems to hang over the tower, and nearby shepherds claim to see frequent flashes of lightning or magic through the gloom. An ever-expanding area of desolation surrounds the Tower of Chaos. Armies of evil and chaos swarm from its protection each new moon and wreak havoc on neighboring villages and passing travelers.
- King Slaciswenz has sent several parties of clerics, sorcerers, and others, including a full regiment of the palace guards to assault the Tower of Chaos to retrieve his daughter. None has returned, nor have any messages of their

progress been received. Several clerics have attempted to remove the magical curse. All have been struck dead in their attempts.

- Michelle is intelligent, beautiful, and strong-willed.
- It is rumored that, if she is not rescued in time, Michelle will throw herself from the tower just before dawn's early light on her birthday in the hope that such a noble sacrifice will prevent the curse from being fulfilled.
- The Tower of Chaos is a 12- to 16-hour ride away, depending upon the roads and any delays that may be incurred. The route does not pass through the capital city, Urmenschgefuel. A detour to see the king would add at least 10 hours to the journey.
- Michelle's birthday is tomorrow at dawn.
- The group can travel along the main highway, west to the coastal mountain pass, or they can try to go through the fields and find the fabled Tunnel of Darkness. Normally the road would be the quickest and safest route.

SCENE 3: You Can Have It All

Road and Pass Route

> As you leave, you notice there are many more travelers on the road than one usually encounters, and the travelers are not the usual blend of well-to-do merchants, bands of adventurers, and missionary clerics. Instead they are a motley assortment of peasants and townspeople heading away from the kingdom of Good King Slaciswenz. And they are carrying what appears to be their worldly possessions.

If the PCs question the travelers, they learn the following:

- All are fleeing the curse of Rann, due to be fulfilled at dawn tomorrow.
- The land has indeed been cursed with drought, blight, and locusts, since the rumored abduction of the Princess Michelle several months ago.
- The King lies near death in the palace. All but his most loyal courtiers have fled.
- Fire and looting are reported in the capital city. Bandits lurk along the highway, stealing from the overburdened and weary travelers. Occasionally, though rarely, the travelers band together to drive them off.
- Smoke billows from the mountains by the sea in the direction of the Tower of Chaos.

As the PCs progress, the number of people on the road increases steadily. Soon the PCs approach the border to the kingdom of Skittledom. Abruptly the lush greenery along the side of the road gives way to wilting bushes, dry, brittle grasslands, and defoliated trees. Stream beds are dry, and ponds are brackish and stagnant. Soon the throngs fill the road and the PCs find it difficult to make acceptable progress into the kingdom.

As they try to move through the crowd, the PCs are greeted by cries of "Turn around!" and "Get off the road!" If the PCs persist in moving along the roadway, eventually they will encounter a belligerent man (actually one of Rann Dohm's spies) in a bottlenecked area between two rocky hills. The spy yells, "They go in to join the forces of evil and chaos." This stirs up the crowd, which, if left to its own devices, erupts into cries of "They block our path to safety!" and "They have fallen under Rann Dohm's spell!" This, in turn gives rise to cries of "Get them!" "Kill the allies of Rann Dohm!" and "Stop them, before they kill more!"

The crowd attempts to surge through the bottleneck, brandishing sticks, knives, axes, and frying pans. Women and children fall down in the surging mass and scream for help. The forward members of the crowd press against the PCs' mounts or vehicles. Unless prevented, the riot blooms into full-scale pandemonium, with the crowd attempting to dismount the PCs and attacking until the party can retreat or escape, or until the PCs can intimidate or calm the crowd into leaving them alone. There are several ways to accomplish the latter, but a well-placed *sleep* spell or the bardic ability to influence crowds would work best.

Rabble Rouser: Int High; AL CE; AC 5; MV 9; HD 3; hp 24; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M; ML 15; XP 120.

The rabble rouser, Ornge, is a half-elven fighter thief (level 2/3). He wears leather armor and carries a short sword and three daggers. His rogue abilities are:

PP	OL	FT	MS	HS	HN	CW
55	43	30	32	30	15	87

Generic Crowd Members (150): Int Average; AL N; AC 10; MV 9 (12 if panicked); HD 1; hp 4 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SZ M; ML 10; XP nil (individuals) 500 (stopping riot).

If the party kills or captures Ornge, they find on him an invitation to the wedding of Rann Dohm and Princess Michelle, scheduled for dawn at the Tower of Chaos. The invitation also says: "Those of you traveling to the Tower should be sure to remember that the wedding will include all of the traditional elements. Some things never change."

As the party moves on along the road the crowds thin, but it will take them 16 hours just to reach the pass through the mountains. As they move toward the mountains the air turns chilly, a brisk wind picks up, and eventually a biting, freezing rain starts.

> As the now untraveled road winds its way upward to the pass, an eerie sight greets you. White snow along the slopes has been tinted dirty gray by falling ash, and rivulets of lava pierce through the snow and flow steadily downward to fill the once lush valleys with liquid rock. The ash creates a fine gray film in the air, which swirls with the slightest movement to sting your eyes and your throat. In the distance you hear a rumbling sound grow then fade. A pack of wolves howls nearby. As you reach the crest of the pass, you see, or at least sense, the vast dark ocean in the distance down the other side of the mountains. Between you and the wine dark sea, you see a pinnacle of motion and darkness. Then random lightning splits the night.

Assuming no detours, the party must spend 12 turns moving through the pass. The PCs suffer 1d3 points of damage each turn from burning particles in the swirling ash and must save vs. breath weapon once during the trip. Failure causes a choking fit which inflicts 1d4 points of damage per round. Effective remedies include *slow poison* spells or anything that shields the victim from the ash (such as a damp cloak thrown over the victim's head).

Smart PCs will try to protect themselves from the ash before any saves fail. Characters who try to protect them-

selves by breathing through a damp cloth still suffer burn damage, but they make their breath weapon save at +4. A damp head covering negates all damage, but blinds the characters so they could stumble too close to the lava and suffer 2-8 points of damage per incident. Protective spells such as *flame walk* negate burning damage, but not the breath weapon save.

As the party leaves the pass, monitor their conversation. Unless everyone is careful to whisper, they will trigger an avalanche. At first they hear a crack, then a deafening rumble above and behind them. A wall of ice and snow rushes down from the peaks to fill the pass. So long as the PCs rush immediately for safety, let them attain it with only the knee-deep remains of the avalanche reaching them. Otherwise, the party suffers 2d10 points of damage (1/2 damage if a character falls to the ground or takes cover as the avalanche approaches). Each character who did not run for safety is buried in 2d3 feet of snow; those who make CON checks remain conscious and can dig out at the rate of one foot per round. However, it takes a Wisdom check to know which direction to dig, otherwise the character parallels the surface. Buried characters have enough air for 1d6+4 rounds, then they must hold their breaths (see PHB, page 122).

Shortly after the avalanche, a nest of snow snakes disturbed by the avalanche will attack. The six translucent white snow snakes slither and tunnel through the snow, so they are impossible to detect prior to striking.

Snow Snakes (6): Int Low; AL N; AC 8; MV 15; HD 3; hp 11 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4 + save vs. poison; SZ S; ML 11; XP 120 each.

Snow snake venom is insidious, having no affect on the character poisoned until he or she gets out of the cold and warms up to normal body temperature. At that point, fever, shivering, and chills set in. The poison is not fatal, but it weakens the victim, who loses one hit point per turn until he or she reaches zero hit points and is incapacitated.

Field And Tunnel Route

> You escape the crowds by moving over the fields and shorten somewhat the distance you must travel. The fields are rough with the stubble of withered crops and with the residue of crude attempts to plow the hardened crust.

Each PC should roll percentile dice once for each hour traveling over the fields to determine if he or his horse stumbles on the rough terrain; a roll of 99 or 100 indicates a stumble. Those who stumble suffer 1d8 points of damage; 7 or more points of stumbling damage to a horse slows its movement rate by two until the animal is cured. It takes 12 hours to ride overland to the Tunnel of Darkness.

Unless the PCs ask directions from one of the few remaining citizens of these parts, they will have difficulty locating the entrance to the tunnel in the gloom of night. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that it is the night of the new moon, and there is a fine ash in the air from volcanic activity in the mountains.

A distant light in a farmhouse helps the PCs locate Kurt, a crusty old farmer who is not about to let anyone run him off his land. He's farmed dirt all his life, and he has lived in the distant shadow of the Tower of Chaos all that time. It is his land, and he means to protect it. Of course, Kurt believes the PCs are marauding evil creatures. (Who else would approach the farm at night?) They must convince him or overcome him before he will answer questions.

Kurt: Int Average; AL CN; AC 6; MV 12; HD 4; hp 26; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (pitchfork); SZ M; ML 15; XP 120.

With Kurt's assistance, the PCs can find the tunnel entrance in one hour. Without his aid, the search takes two hours. The party's mounts and vehicles cannot fit into the tunnel.

The Tunnel of Darkness is not the typical cavern with stalagmites and stalactites. It is black and fairly smooth and round, with a sometimes porous, sometimes glassy surface. The smell of steam and sulphur rises from it. In geological terms, it is a volcanic steam vent, formed as exterior lava cooled around a center of hotter rushing lava. Steam from the magma far below shaped and smoothed the tube.

> The black surface seems to suck up the light of your torches, except for the occasional bright glare off a glassy portion of the wall. At first the passage slopes consistently downward, then it levels.

> After about a quarter mile, the passageway forks, rising to the left and downward to the right. Steam rises from the right passage.

There is a Salamander living in a pool of boiling lava 300 feet down the right passage. It attacks if the PCs approach.

Salamander (1): Int High; AL CE; AC 5/3; MV 9; HD 7+7; hp 39; THAC0 13; #AT 2; Dmg 2-12, 1-6 (weapon); SA Heat 1-6; SD +1 or better to hit; SZ M; ML 13; XP 2,000.

> Continuing down the passage, a second fork appears. You can take the right passage, which rises slightly, or take the left, which appears level.

The left passage leads to the web of a giant spider. As the party approaches, they can see the web and a number of objects embedded in it, including a parchment. The giant spider attacks as the party approaches.

Giant Spider: Int Low; AL CE; AC 4; MV 3, Wb 12; HD 4+4; hp 20; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA type F poison; SZ L; ML 13; XP 650.

If the party examines the items in the web, they find several daggers, 12 gold pieces, a top hat, a shovel, a broken flask, and a wedding invitation similar to the one described in the road and pass section. If the party sets fire to the web while dealing with the giant spider, the invitation will burn up.

The party must go back to the main passage to get out.

> The right passage continues for another quarter mile, then empties out onto a narrow cliff which leads down to the main road. The wine dark sea stretches away in the distance, and in the flashes of lightning splitting the night you see darkness and motion in a pinnacle halfway between you and the ocean.

It takes at least one hour to traverse the Tunnel of Darkness.

SCENE 4: Gimme A Light

Rounding a bend in the road, the PCs finally catch sight of the Tower of Chaos. It sits atop a small rise about a half

mile away. A field of devastation surrounds it: jagged and cratered earth, twisted and blackened tree stumps, patches of glassy sheet rock. The only opening in the Tower of Chaos appears to be a tiny window near the top. A careful study of the terrain suggests a possible tunnel entrance about three-quarters of the way across the devastated field.

When the PCs get about halfway across the field, things suddenly become dark and silent. Two rounds later a *fireball* goes off in the midst of the party.

Actually, Ingmar, the guardian cleric, and Sveltt, the guardian mage, of the Tower of Chaos have cast *darkness* and *silence 15' radius* on the party, then *fireball.* This is their typical means of warding off inquisitive adventurers, as the landscape around the Tower attests. See Scene 8 for statistics on Ingmar and Sveltt. Once their spells are cast, the two characters retire into the tower, confident that intruders will be frustrated by the tower's defenses.

SCENE 5: Rann Dohm's Keep

Rann Dohm's keep is an imposing sight. It stands about 100 feet tall and is nearly the same in diameter at the base, tapering slightly as it rises from the blackened earth. The tower is constructed of huge blocks of basalt and has no doors and but one window. The single window looks out from the top of the tower, but is small and heavily barred. Anyone who attempts to scale the tower has normal climbing chances until reaching a height of 40 feet. At that point Rann Dohm has placed a magical surface that is slippery and unclimbable. To keep from falling a climber must roll under half his normal climbing roll. If this roll succeeds, the climber has prevented a fall and may climb back down using normal rolls. The slippery section is 30 feet high and cannot be climbed under any circumstances.

On the keep side of the small hillock is the concealed entrance to the passages below the keep. There is a locked and bolted trap door in the roof of the keep, but the pregenerated PCs have no way to reach it. Other PCs might attempt to fly to the keep's roof. However, this is protected by a magical field with a 60-foot diameter. It is similar to an *anti-magic shell,* as it temporarily negates all *flying* and *levitation* magics—including potions and magical items such as *brooms of flying* that enter its radius.

Carefully searching the hillock reveals that the large boulder lying on the keep side is actually a door leading to a vertical shaft that descends into the earth beneath the hillock.

The shaft is 10 feet in diameter and descends 40 feet. Firmly attached to the wall directly beneath the concealed door is a metal ladder. The ladder appears to be new and quite sturdy. The heroes can take whatever precautions they wish, but simply climbing down the ladder will work quite nicely.

At the bottom of the shaft is a tunnel that leads north for 10 feet and then arcs toward the east and the keep. The tunnel is a natural cavern; the shaft was obviously constructed to connect the tunnel to the surface. The tunnel continues eastward for about 250 feet. Along this stretch it varies from five to 15 feet in diameter, with only occasional signs of being worked at the narrow points.

SCENE 6: Rann Dohm's Traditional Wedding Gauntlet

> For 250 feet or so the tunnel continues without interruption or antagonist. Then the natural tunnel veers to the left, northeasterly toward the keep, and an ancient manmade passage connects to the tunnel from the southeast. Although both passages have had their share of traffic over the years, the ancient passage is in need of repair. What you can see of it from the fork appears to be safe, however.

SCENE 6A: The Ghost

> The left passage leads to a large, manmade cavern furnished in a glorious manner as a library in an old mansion. There are five large, oak study tables with six chairs each. Lining the walls are 12-foot-tall bookcases filled with books, rolled manuscripts, and maps. At one end of the room is a roaring fireplace, surrounded by a trio of stuffed sofas.
>
> A beautiful, thick, royal blue rug lies between the fireplace and the sofas. Over the mantle hangs a picture of a man smoking a pipe. He leans against a desk cluttered with papers (none readable).
>
> Directly opposite the entrance to the room is a large, closed oak door. The room appears warm and inviting, but unoccupied.

If the heroes enter the room, they will be immediately attacked by the occupant, Marshall Hunter Fox, the man in the picture. Marshall died a century ago and now haunts this room as a ghost. Marshall assumes a semi-material form to melee with the heroes. He focuses his attacks on any Lawful Good heroes present. (Among the pregenerated characters, these are Sonnett, Squib, Crystal, and Quantum). If he is wounded for more than a third of his hit points, Marshall breaks off his attacks and resumes his ethereal form. If the heroes leave his room without disturbing anything, he will let them go. If, however, they try to remove any books or manuscripts from the shelves, he resumes his attacks, focusing on those who disturbed his library. If he is wounded for another third of his hit points, he again breaks off his attack as before, giving the PCs another chance to leave without taking anything. If they don't leave empty handed, he will fight them to the death. Under no circumstances will he follow the PCs out of the room.

If the heroes persist and succeed in destroying the ghost, they can examine his library without further interruption. However, there is nothing interesting in the room except a secret door behind one of the bookcases. The books would be of immense value to a sage (DMs are free to set a value appropriate to their campaigns, but at least 3,000 gp). None of the books or scrolls are magical or valuable.

Marshall Hunter Fox (ghost): Int High; AL LE; AC 0 or 8; MV 9; HD 10; hp 58; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg Age 10-40 Years; SZ M; ML Special; XP 7,000.

Just seeing Marshall causes PCs to age 10 years and run in panic for 2-12 turns unless they save vs. spells. (Clerics above 6th are immune; other characters above 8th get +2 on saves). Marshall is hit only by silver or magic weapons.

SCENE 6B: Black Dragon

If the heroes choose the "old" passage (the wedding invitations hint at this), they can travel down it uneventfully for about 50 feet, where the ancient corridor continues in the southeasterly direc-

tion and a newly constructed passage leads to the northeast. It opens up after another 50 feet into a large cavern that extends out of lantern range. The cavern is 35 feet high and 100 feet in diameter. Initially, the room appears to be empty.

Unfortunately for the heroes, a black dragon is resting in a cave 20 feet over the entrance of the room. If the heroes do not specifically indicate they are looking up and behind them as they enter the room, they will be surprised by the dragon's first attack. The dragon will attack with his breath weapon when the heroes reach the middle of the cavern. About then, the PCs notice a large pile of treasure at the far side of the cavern.

After the initial breath attack, the dragon swoops to melee the heroes. If the dragon is reduced below a third of its hit points, it flies back into its cave.

If the heroes decide to leave by the north exit, the dragon will be content to lick its wounds and let them leave. If they try to follow the dragon into the cave or try to steal treasure from its hoard, it will attack with its breath twice more, using its *darkness* ability and *grease* spell in between to confuse the PCs.

Young Adult Black Dragon: Int Average; AL CE; AC 0; MV 12, Fl 30 (C), Sw 12; HD 13; hp 48; THAC0 7; #AT 3; Dmg 1-6 +5/1-6 +5/3-18 +5; SZ M; ML 16; XP 8,000.

The dragon can use its breath weapon once every three rounds; it is a 5′ × 60′ stream of acid that does 10d4 +5 points of, save for half. Three times a day, it can cast *darkness* in a 50-foot radius. It also can cast a *grease* spell. When swooping to the attack, it can strike only with its front claws, but at a +2 "to hit."

If the heroes manage to kill the dragon, they can find mounds of silver and gold (5,000 gp and 20,000 sp) and 50 small gems (10 gp each) scattered amongst the coins.

SCENE 6C: Color My World

If the heroes choose correctly and select the "new" passage, they will have another choice to make about 25 feet down that corridor. After 25 feet, the "new" passage turns north. At that point a four foot diameter hole connects to the passage from the right. Examining the hole reveals it was made by a creature that burrows in solid rock. It enters the passage about a foot and a half above the floor and leads east.

If the heroes continue north in the "new" passage, they will find the easily seen back side of the secret "bookcase" door to the library (6A).

If the heroes crawl through the burrowed tunnel, they find themselves in a room with five colored doors: red, blue, green, orange, and yellow. The orange door leads to the ghost's library (6C); the red door leads to a room with rust monsters; the yellow door leads to a room with ettins; the green door leads to the black dragon's lair (6B); and the blue door bypasses the obstacles to reach the spiral stair that leads upward to the keep.

Rust Monsters (3): Int Animal; AL N; AC 2; MV 18; HD 5; hp 32, 26, 24; THAC0 15; #AT 2; nil; SZ M (5′ long); ML 9; XP 270 each.

Any metal item that strikes or is struck by a rust monster corrodes and falls to pieces. Magical items have a base 10% chance to resist for each plus.

Ettins (3): Int Low; AL CE; AC 3; MV 12; HD 10; hp 51, 49, 47; THAC0 10; #AT 2; Dmg 3-18/2-16; SD Surprised only on a 1; SZ H; ML 14; XP 3,000 each.

SCENE 7: Gargoyles At 12 O'Clock (and 2 and 4 and . . .)

When the heroes reach the spiral stairs, they can begin their climb into the keep. The first level is about 40 feet up. When they reach the first level, Rann Dohm's gargoyle guards begin attacking. The heroes can either stand and fight or fight while climbing. If they are running out of time, they should choose the latter. Anyone fighting while on the stairs may be knocked off; a successful hit on a PC requires the PC to roll under his Dexterity or fall from the stairs. The gargoyle guards will fight the heroes all the way up or until only four are left. These four will retreat to Rann Dohm's lair to protect their leader in the final fight.

The tower's first level has a 25-foot ceiling at the south—it is open to the 5th level on the north. The room is 60 feet in diameter and sports five columns which support the upper floors. There is a five-foot-wide ledge all around the level, 15 feet above the floor. This is used as a perch for the gargoyles; they swoop to attack from this ledge and will use it for partial cover when not attacking.

The second level is open on the north and has the living quarters for the gargoyles on the south. The ceiling here is 15 feet tall, with a five-foot wide perching ledge on the north side, 10 feet above the floor. The doors to the gargoyle rooms cannot be reached from the stairs. They only can be reached by flying. There are four such doors; the one on the left belongs to the captain of the gargoyles. His name is Lyfe and that name is lettered on his door in black. His assistant, Chyl, has the door on the right; it is also labelled in black. If the heroes find a way into these rooms, they will find little of interest.

The third level has a balcony leading from the stairs to three guest rooms. They are currently unoccupied. Although Michelle has been living in the one in the center since her abduction, she is now on the fifth level with Rann Dohm. The heroes can find evidence of a young woman staying in the middle room (a strand of hair, garments, etc.). The other rooms are empty.

The fourth level is similar to the third, but there are only two rooms on this level. These rooms are the living quarters for Ingmar and Sveltt. Both doors are warded (3d10 electrical damage) and *wizard locked.* If the heroes persist in attempting to enter one of these rooms, Rann Dohm and his remaining henchmen attack them here from above.

Gargoyles (18): Int Low; AL CE; AC 5; MV 9, Fl 15 (C); HD 4 +4; hp 36 (Lyfe), 30 (Chyl), 4@26, 8@24, 4@20; THAC0 17; #AT 4; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-6/1-4; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; SZ M; ML 11; XP 650 each.

SCENE 8: Rann Dohm's Lair

When the heroes reach the fifth level, they will have to fight the evil mage Rann Dohm and his minions. Rann Dohm's spies have warned him of the heroes' coming.

If the heroes arrive before dawn, they find Michelle here with Rann Dohm and his henchmen. She is dressed in a wedding gown, but has been bound and gagged and is tied to the frame of the spiral staircase. This places her in the center of the battle and makes her very vulnerable to any area effect spells cast by either side. Rann's men have been cautioned to refrain from such spells and have planned their spell selections accordingly. The heroes will have to be equally careful to keep Michelle alive.

Of course, smart PCs will try to untie Michelle and get her out of the middle of the fight.

If the heroes arrive after dawn, they find Michelle dead, having been killed by Rann Dohm when she refused to wed him just before dawn and attacked him instead. This action foiled the curse, as it kept her from reaching her 21st birthday. The kingdom is saved, but the heroes have failed. They should still attempt to defeat Rann Dohm and his henchmen, however. This situation will be especially hard on Sonnett, as he will recognize her as the woman in his dreams.

Rann's battle plan will be much the same whether Michelle is alive or dead. The gargoyle guards attack the party's fighters, two on each if possible. Rann Dohm, Ingmar, and Sveltt use their spells as described below.

Rann Dohm and his henchmen will cast several spells before the melee to enhance their chances in the battle. Rann Dohm will cast *protection from good,* and *protection from normal missiles* on Ingmar, Sveltt, and himself; *haste* on all seven in his party; *strength* on each of the four gargoyles; *grease* on the floor surrounding the spiral staircase (avoiding the areas where Ingmar, Sveltt, and he are standing); and *globe of invulnerability* and *fire shield* (cold flames) on himself.

Sveltt will cast *shield, cantrip,* and *unseen servant.*

Ingmar will cast *aid* on both Lyfe and Chyl and *protection from good* on all four gargoyles.

As the heroes enter this level (or as the attack begins if Rann Dohm elects to attack them on the fourth level), Rann Dohm casts *slow,* Ingmar casts *silence, 15 foot radius,* and Sveltt casts *darkness, 15 Foot Radius.* Following the initial spell assault, the gargoyles will hover near the *darkness* waiting for an opportunity. Other spells are cast as the action dictates. Ingmar will move amongst the villains, curing wounds as needed.

If all of his henchmen are killed or immobilized, Rann Dohm flees using his *teleport without error* spell. Naturally, he will plan to avenge this loss another day. But that's another story.

Gargoyles (4): Int Low; AL CE; AC 5; MV 9, Fl 15 (C); HD 4+4; hp 36 (Lyfe), 30 (Chyl), 26, 24; THAC0 17; #AT 4; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-6/1-4; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; SZ M; ML 11; XP 650 each.

The gargoyles' *hasted* movement rates are 18, Fl 30 for 15 rounds. They get 8 attacks a round and a −2 initiative bonus while *hasted.* The *protection from good* gives them a −2 AC bonus and +2 saving throw bonus against attacks launched by good creatures for 16 rounds. Lyfe and Chyl each get 1d8 bonus hit points, +1 "to hit" and an additional +1 to all saves for 5 rounds. The *strength* spells give the gargoyles +1 "to hit" and damage on each melee attack.

Ingmar: Int High; AL CE; AC 3; MV 9; HD 6; hp 29; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M; ML 16; XP 975.

Ingmar moves 18 and gets two melee attacks each round while *hasted* (18 rounds). The *protection from normal missiles* renders him immune to all nonmagical missiles. The *protection from good* gives him a −2 AC bonus and +2 saving throw bonus against attacks launched by good creatures for 16 rounds.

Magic items: He carries a *staff of curing* (12 charges), *chain mail +2, ring of mind shielding.*

Spells remaining: *Cure light wounds* (x3), *Light, Silence, 15 foot radius.*

Sveltt: Int High; AL CE; AC 4; MV 12; HD 6; hp 15; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M; ML 16; XP 975.

Sveltt moves 24 and gets two melee attacks each round while *hasted* (18 rounds). The *protection from normal missiles* renders him immune to all nonmagical missiles and the *shield* blocks all *magic missile* spells originating from his front and gives him a frontal AC of 2 vs. hurled missiles and 3 vs. propelled missiles that get by the *protection from normal missiles.* The *protection from good* gives him a −2 AC bonus and +2 saving throw bonus against attacks launched by good creatures for 16 rounds.

Magic items: *bracers of defense AC 4, scarab of protection, wand of magic missiles* (21 charges).

Spells remaining: *Darkness, 15 foot radius; fireball.*

Rann Dohm: Int Genius; AL CE; AC −1; MV 12; HD 13; hp 27; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M; ML 16; XP 6,000.

Rann moves 24 and gets two melee attacks each round while *hasted* (18 rounds). The *protection from normal missiles* renders him immune to all nonmagical missiles and the *globe of invulnerability* keeps all spells of 4th level or lower from entering its five-foot radius (duration 13 rounds). The *protection from good* gives him a −2 AC bonus and +2 saving throw bonus against attacks launched by good creatures for 16 rounds.

Magic items: Wand of frost (19 charges), *ring of protection +3, bracers of defense AC 2, ring of free action, amulet of life protection, periapt of proof against poison +1, winged boots* (Fl 18 (B)), *brooch of shielding* (84 hit points), *necklace of adaption.*

Spells remaining: *Teleport without error, Otiluke's freezing sphere, cone of cold* (x2), *Bigby's interposing hand, monster summoning III, polymorph self, slow, levitate, wall of fog.*

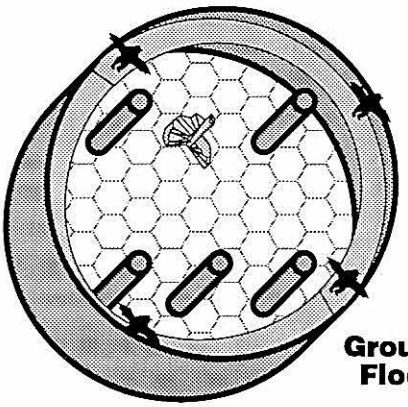
SCENE 9: The Wedding

If the heroes can defeat Rann Dohm's forces before dawn and Michelle is still alive, they still must arrange for a quick marriage (Rann's curse still threatens). Be kind; if the PCs make a reasonable attempt to talk her into it, she should agree. The Sonnett character, if present, recognizes her as his dream woman and should want to marry her. If he is unavailable, Michelle will consider a reasonable proposal from Squib or Kelf (Quantum would be OK if he could recover his lost youth, somehow). If none of the pregenerated characters are present, the DM will have to decide which PC Michelle prefers. The DM also will have to decide what effect such a marriage will have on the PC's life, which could be anything from mandatory retirement to a royal title. A cleric dedicated to a good deity must preform the ceremony. Among the pregenerated characters, Crystal is the only one qualified, and this should provide her with a difficult decision if Sonnett is the groom.

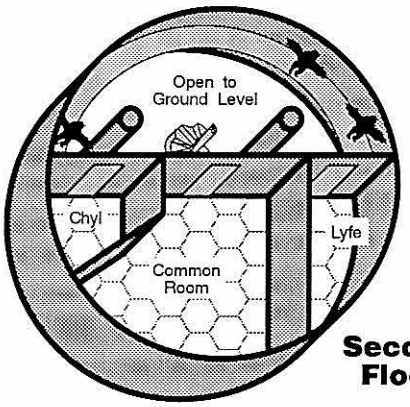
When the ceremony begins, the guests arrive. A party of 20 orcs dressed in tuxedos appear to help Rann Dohm celebrate his marriage.

Orc (20): Int Average; AL LE; AC 6 (10); MV 9 (12); HD 1; hp 10@6, 5@7, 5@8; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (weapon); SZ M; ML 12; XP 15 each.

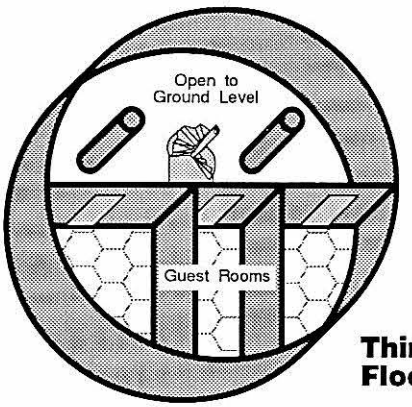
❑



Ground Floor



Second Floor



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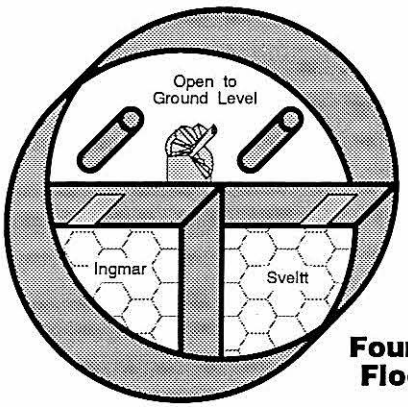
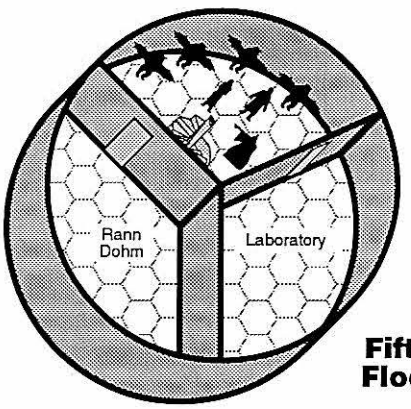


Fourth Floor



Fifth Floor

KEY

One Hex Equals Five Feet

Spiral Staircase

Rann Dohm

Ingmar

Gargoyle

Sveltt

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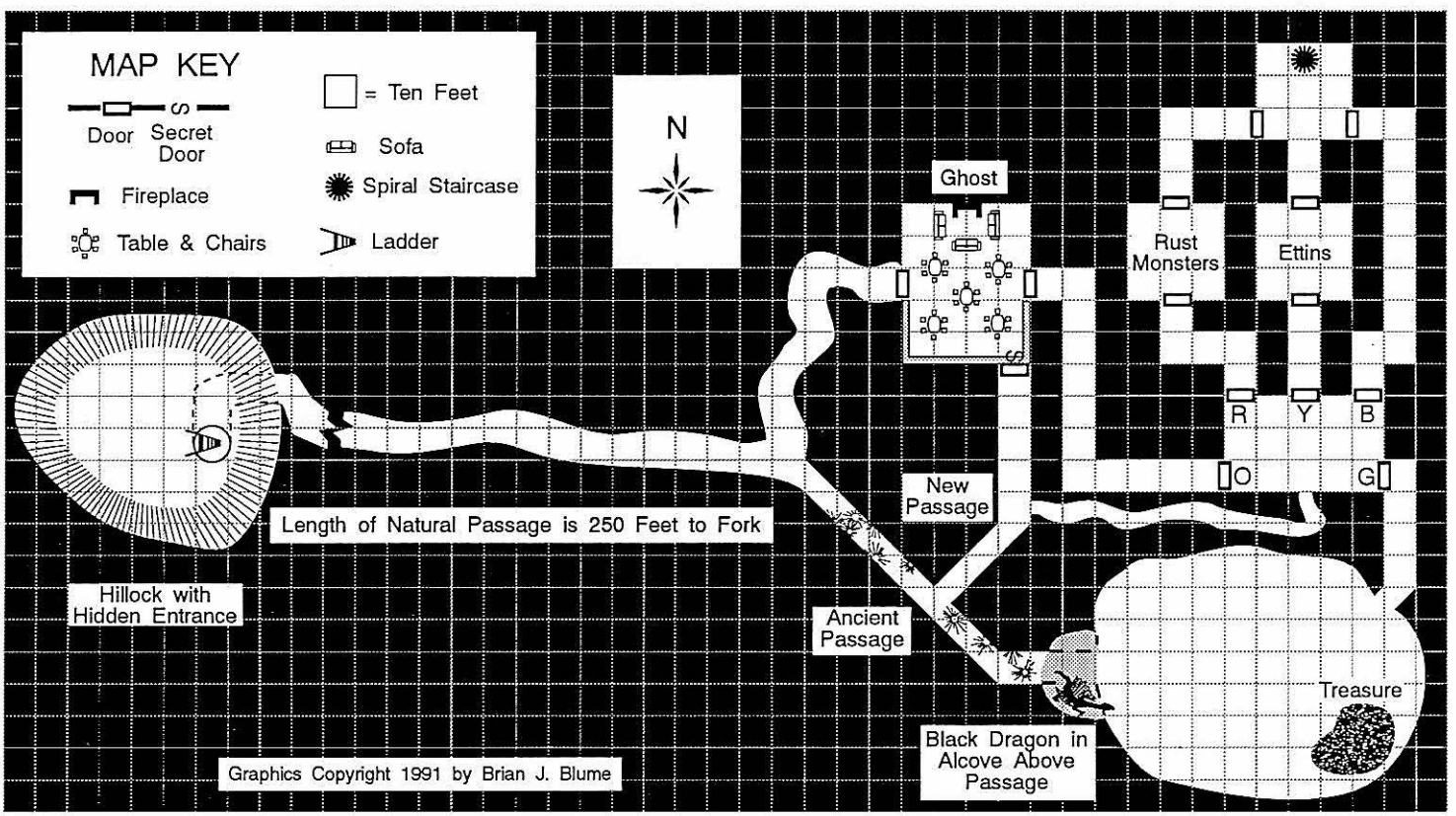


Sonnett

7th Level Male Human Paladin

STR: 18/47
INT: 15
WIS: 14
DEX: 13
CON: 15
CHR: 17
AC Normal: −4
AC Rear: −2
Hit Points: 51
Alignment: Lawful Good
Languages: Common, Elven, Dwarven
THAC0: 14

Age: 26
Height: 6′
Weight: 185 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Brown/Steely gray

Weapon Proficiencies: Long sword, bastard sword, dagger, mace, staff, short sword
NonWeapon Proficiencies: Endurance (15), swimming (18), plains survival (15), religion (14), ancient history (14), riding, land-based (17)

Magic Items: *Field plate +3, shield +2, long sword +3, ring of fire resistance, ring or warmth, potion of sweetwater, potion of extra healing*
Equipment: 10 gp, 5 sp, tack and harness for mount, saddlebags, 3 days' iron rations, 1 day's grain for mount, polishing cloth and metal polish, 50′ of rope, tinder box, 3 torches
Mount: Roan medium warhorse named Will: Int Animal; AL N; AC 7; MV 18; HD 2+2; hp 13; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1-6/1-6; SZ L; ML 7

As a paladin, Sonnett can detect evil within 60′ just by concentrating. He receives +2 to all saving throws and is immune to all forms of non-magical disease. He can heal 14 points of damage each day by laying on hands and can *cure disease* twice a week. He is continuously surrounded by *protection from evil 10′ radius.*

I am dedicated to my calling as a paladin and to my efforts to foster goodness and law. I am not the pushy, pompous, preachy type that too often joins my order. I believe actions speak louder than words and that good deeds and unselfish rescues of those who find themselves in harm's way do more to promote goodness than speechifying.

I often feel a touch of longing and

Squib

5th Level Male Human Fighter

STR: 17
INT: 13
WIS: 13
DEX: 16
CON: 12
CHR: 17
AC Normal: −1
AC Rear: 4
Hit Points: 39
Alignment: Lawful Good
Languages: Common, Elven
THAC0: 16

Age: 25
Height: 5′ 10″
Weight: 155 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Brown/Brown

Weapon Proficiencies: Long sword, short sword, dagger, battle axe, staff
NonWeapon Proficiencies: Endurance (16), swimming (17), riding, land-based (16), hunting (12), direction sense (14)

Magic Items: *Chain mail +1, shield +2, long sword +1, potion of extra healing, ring of swimming*
Equipment: 6 gp, 3 sp, 2 days' iron rations, battle axe, awl, spool of heavy thread, canteen, flask of oil, two tinder boxes, 4 torches, 50′ of rope, bag of salt

The others don't know it, but I'm a former 5th level paladin. I lost my paladinhood when an evil cleric enchanted me and convinced me to use the last of the party's water to clean my armor while my companions and I were attempting to cross the Desert of Despair. I can become a paladin again, but to atone for my frivolous and shameful (albeit enchanted) act, I have been assigned the task of acting selflessly in the service of another paladin (who does not know my past). I must not reveal my past or my training. As part of my service, I must "give up my desires in order to save others."

I look forward to the day when I can act the hero for the party and actively volunteer for scouting and fighting responsibilities. I'm not sure what is meant by the phrase "give up my desires." I desire strongly the freedom of being an adventuring paladin, unfettered by family ties and able to go wherever my heart and my quest leads. I am prepared, however, to be captured and thrown in prison, but I'm not sure if that is what is meant. I am outfitted as a normal fighter now, and never use or

Crystal

5th Level Female Human Priestess of Vishnu

STR: 11
INT: 14
WIS: 18
DEX: 16
CON: 15
CHR: 14
AC Normal: 2
AC Rear: 4
Hit Points: 37
Alignment: Lawful Good
Languages: Common, Elven, Dwarven, Gnomish
THAC0: 18

Age: 26
Height: 5′ 7″
Weight: 145 lbs.
Hair/Eyes: Blond/Blue

Weapon Proficiencies: Staff, sling, hammer
NonWeapon Proficiencies: Religion (18), healing (16), read/write Common (15), ancient history (13), pottery (14), weaving (13)

Magic Items: *Bracers of defense AC 4, ring of water walking, staff of curing* (14 charges) *Keoghtom's ointment* (1 application), *scroll* (two *neutralize poison* spells), *scroll* (two *remove paralysis* spells)
Spells/day: 5 5 2
Equipment: Backpack, cooking spices, holy symbol, staff, sling, 20 sling stones, book of ceremonies (burial, wedding, consecration, etc.), bandages, pots and pans, tent, small horse-drawn cart
Cart Horse: Dapple gray draft horse named Snowman: Int Animal; AL N; AC 7; MV 12; HD 3; hp 12; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1-3; SZ L; ML 7

As a priestess of Vishnu, Crystal can turn undead and *pacify* humans, humanoids, or demi-humans. This ability uses the undead turning table vs. the target's hit dice. **T** = break off attacks and offer friendship to the priestess. **D** = same as above but target is committed to peace for a full day; targets cannot initiate attacks, attacks against *pacified* creatures are −2 "to hit," and the creatures return such attacks at +2 "to hit." **D*** = same as above but affected creatures are −3/+3. Crystal has major access to the spheres of All, Sun, Healing, Charm, and Necromancy; and minor access to the sphere of Protection.

I do not enjoy adventure, danger, risks, or wandering about the countryside, but I travel with this party for two very important reasons. First, there is much good which needs to be done in the world, and it is not going to get done by sitting in a convent somewhere. Second, I love Sonnett and will go wherever he leads. Although he has a kind of brotherly fondness for me, Sonnett does not love me in the same way I love him. I do not know why this is so.

I continue to strive to further Sonnett's quest to bring goodness and law to the far flung lands of the known world, hoping that one day he will come to love me. If not, I am content to serve his causes and see to his happiness. Since he has shown no interest in romancing other women, except a dream girl who does not exist, I still hope.

I am devout and hard-working and do not complain or act squeamishly about the hardships the group faces on the road. I often cook to impress Sonnett. I tend toward protective and curative spells, rather than militaristic spells. I always keep one curing spell in reserve for Sonnett, but the others—including Sonnett—don't know it.

Sonnett: Brave, good, lawful, handsome, outgoing, and a born leader. His happiness is my chief concern after my devotions, though I am careful to not appear too subservient or fawning.

Squib: This man seems to bear some mysterious burden. Although friendly and outgoing, he seems strangely troubled.

Kelf: A true romantic, dabbling in this and that while he sharpens his skills as a songwriter. He seems desperately eager to experience a romantic adventure worthy of a truly epic song. The others chide him for being lazy, but I try to keep up his spirits and encourage his music.

Vasquez: I greatly admire her bravery and fighting skill. I would never be able to do the things she does to protect the party from harm.

Quantum: This dear old man seems to have seen and experienced everything in his long life. Only I know he is much younger than he appears, having been aged 40 years in an encounter with a ghost. No wonder he obtained a magical amulet to turn undead. He acts gruff and tough, but I know his life has been hard and he is enjoying what is sure to be his last bit of adventuring while he still can.

reveal my paladin's training and powers (I probably couldn't use them even if I wanted to). One of my tasks is cleaning and polishing Sonnett's armor. This grates on me, as it reminds me of my shame.

My quest is to regain my paladinhood, so I am careful not to encumber myself with close personal relationships. Although friendly and outgoing, I do not reveal too much of myself, even to my fellow adventurers. An inveterate bachelor, I neither have designs on any of the women in the party, nor do I become entangled with local women during my travels. I want nothing to distract me from my quest.

Sonnett: A capable and experienced leader, though he lacks grandiose style of my order. I respect his wishes, though I occasionally chafe secretly when I am treated as a servant. I wait anxiously for the day I can save Sonnett and the others and reveal my true training.

Crystal: Gentle and self-sacrificing, with an amazing amount of willpower. She probably does not belong in an adventuring party. She does not thrill in battle or danger, but she persists in it, because there is good to be done, and quite frankly, because she is obviously in love with Sonnett.

Vasquez: Quick and alert beyond belief, she is a formidable fighting force, although occasionally a bit wild and unpredictable. She looks for danger, then does whatever has to be done to eliminate it. I fear that if she is too near when my ultimate test comes she will sacrifice herself before I get the chance. Accordingly, I encourage Sonnett to use her as rear guard, so that she is not near when I face foes in the front.

Kelf: A lightweight of little tactical use to the party, due to his mediocre skills. I regard him as little more than a reserve force, useful mostly for fetching, carrying, and running messages to and fro. I do like to listen to his music as I shine Sonnett's armor, more to take my mind off things than because I like the music.

Quantum: Old, crotchety, and asthma prone, his magic still is powerful, even if he is not. He is wise in the ways of strategy and puzzles, and I wish for a way to have him decipher my quest without revealing my situation. He tries to teach Kelf, but Kelf apparently does not apply himself to the lessons, as the old man is constantly after him to try harder.

sadness, especially during quiet moments around the fire and during long rides in the early morning. I have an emptiness in my innermost heart of hearts. For years I have loved a woman I do not even know, a woman I do not even know exists in reality. She does exist in my dreams—so beautiful, so perfect, so self-sacrificing, that all of the women of wakeful reality pale in comparison, even Crystal, who obviously loves me. I am kind to Crystal in a brotherly way, but take care that she does not mistake my kindness or my manner as love.

I strive always to be kind, giving, and just. The others do not know it, but I also am constantly searching for the dream woman. Whenever a flash of auburn hair and twinkling green eyes catches my eye, I look intently, hoping that it will be her, and hoping that, if it is not, my gaze will not give offense or embarrassment. I remain celibate, waiting for the day I can commit myself to her, even though I know that such a woman cannot exist.

Squib: Squib speaks little of his past, so I do not know why he serves as my squire rather than seeking a more lofty station in life. Squib is a competent and skilled fighter, though he sometimes seems to be holding back. This is even more odd, as he is a willing volunteer for scouting and fighting tasks. He polishes my armor with expert care, but little enthusiasm.

Crystal: A devout and gentle woman with immense inner strength. I ease her burden of unrequited love with kindness, patience, and brotherly affection.

Vasquez: An incredibly capable fighter, although a bit cold and ruthless at times. Braver than any man I have ever known, she is always ready for reconnaissance and rear guard actions. She has held off pursuing enemies alone more than once.

Kelf: Not a very serious type. It's not that he's a prankster or clown, just that he has never taken his fighting, his magic, or his stealthy arts as seriously as his songwriting.

Quantum: A bit old to be gallivanting around in the damp, cold, Dungeons of the Deep (the site of the group's last adventure). He has been of great service to the group, even though he can be a bit cranky and mysterious at times.

The Living Galaxy

To The Stars—Through Your Local Library

by Roger E. Moore

Any role playing game can be improved with a little research. Even if you are a die-hard, unremorseful *Bunnies & Burrows* game master and your players' rabbit characters are building fusion reactors and have taken over central Pennsylvania, you can add a nice bit of flavor by doing some elementary research on rabbits and woodland animals. Even a militant genius war-bunny will seem curiously believable if it otherwise acts like a normal rabbit. How big is a rabbit? What does it eat? How long is its lifespan? How often does it like to, um, make little rabbits? Add a little reality, and the players (and you) will happily swallow anything.

This is true to a greater extent with science-fiction role playing games, which are founded on (or at least pay lip service to) hard-core, real-life science and technology. A good GM should have some grounding in space science, even if it's just a habit of picking up a copy of *Astronomy* or *Omni* magazine now and then. I hardly suggest that all GMs rush out and get a B.A. in astronomy (though you can if you want; I almost did). But visiting a library or bookstore and picking through the stacks for the cold facts on the universe can provide some delightful surprises for unsuspecting players. For example:

What happens when a four-billion-ton asteroid slams into an inhabited world's ocean?

What is a Bussard interstellar ramjet? What would happen if a spacecraft was sucked into one?

What would happen to a world if a star 100 light-years away went nova? What if that star became a supernova?

What is it like for astronauts during liftoff? during prolonged weightlessness? during atmospheric reentry?

How can you make a dangerous planet habitable for humans within 100 years using pond scum?

What are the good parts about living in a deep-space colony? What are the bad parts?

Why is an onboard spacecraft fire so terrifying?

What does the view look like from the surface of an alien planet? What's it like to look down at one?

Is an inhabited, long-duration space station likely to look neat and tidy, or like a chaotic, filthy mess?

Why would a planet disappear?

I'm not talking about grabbing some good fiction novels on these topics and winging it from there. What I want to know is, *what's the truth*?

Besides the idea-grabbing aspect, checking a science text allows you to avoid awful mistakes like the one I made in POLYHEDRON™ Newszine issue #59 (see issue #62, page 24, for details). You have to get your facts straight first!

This column offers some hard-science reference books you might like to hunt for at your local library, bookstore, or flea market. Some of the "fun facts" you can find in them for use in your campaign are given as well. Be warned that some of these books may be out of print at this time, and thus hard to acquire.

Astronomy, Hard And Soft

You would do well to get an introductory college textbook on astronomy published within the last five years for your own research library. If the textbook has photos from the *Voyager 2* Neptune flyby in 1989, that's a good sign. A good basic astronomy text should offer nuts-and-bolts data on planets, moons, stars, comets, meteors, asteroids, nebulae, galaxies, interstellar dust, and so on—anything that might appear in your game. Look for practical information that you can plug into your campaign. I hate to say this, but theories on the origins of the universe are nice, but they won't help you much as a GM or player. (Thus, though I like Stephen W. Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, I don't recommend you get it to help your campaign. But you might like to read it for your own enjoyment.)

You might also pick up some books on more specialized areas of astronomy, like lunar science, supernovas, or anything else you want to add to your campaign. Don't buy an astronomy text without looking at it first, though. Some are very advanced and might leave you wondering what the heck they're talking about. Always flip through a copy first to make sure you want it.

And now for a few of the astronomy books I've found to be helpful. There are probably better ones out there; if so, write and tell us about them!

Asimov, Isaac. *Jupiter*. New York: Ace Books, 1975 (paperback). I bought this book 15 years ago, and it is wonderful. Much of the information is dated now with the enormous amount of data produced by the *Pioneer* and *Voyager* spacecraft flybys, but as a basic astronomy primer on gas giants and other planets, it is hard to beat. Astronomical terms like albedo, parallax, oblateness, magnitude, and eccentricity are clearly explained, and the details on the makeup of gas giants and their satellites are nice. I found the formula for finding the surface gravity of a planet to be particularly helpful (see chapter six).

French, Bevan M. *The Moon Book*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977 (trade paperback). This is a very readable primer on our Moon—and, by extension, other lunar-type bodies in your science-fiction campaign. You could certainly find enough here to detail a visit to this body or a near relative in a game adventure setting, though Ben Bova's *Welcome to Moonbase*, which appears later, would be of more help.

Mitton, Simon, ed. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Astronomy*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1977 (hardback). This is the basic hard-science reference book I generally use for answering space-related questions, though it is becoming a little outdated. Still, if I want to know how to put together a double-star system with planets, learn the area of effect of a nova or supernova, figure out what a T Tauri or dM5 flare star is, or jot down the composition of a typical comet, I'd pick up this volume. It certainly helps!

Space Travel, Anyone?

Exactly what is it like to go into outer space? Soviet and American space crews, with a host of guests from other countries, have amassed 30 years of real experience in space flight. I haven't seen much information on the you-are-there aspect in any science-fiction game, if there's been any of it at all. These

books provide some raw data on space flight, including the design of free-floating and planetary space colonies. Make use of them in your campaign.

Berry, Adrian. *The Iron Sun: Crossing the Universe Through Black Holes.* New York: Warner Books, 1977 (paperback). Maybe the basic interstellar engines in your game don't use black holes as motive power, but this book has lots of useful information anyway. The black-hole method looks as though it can be added to any campaign by assuming that this mode of travel is a secret government project or is something used by an alien race now or long ago. The Bussard interstellar ramjet is detailed, with ways to uprate it and some of the unpleasant side effects of using it (expect a one-way trip).

Bova, Ben. *Welcome to Moonbase.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1987 (trade paperback). Want a fully designed lunar base *right now*? This book describes one possible base down to the insurance and retirement policies it offers. Spacecraft, surface vehicles, job opportunities, sports, manufacturing, economics, trade, science, tourism, and future plans are all unveiled in this imaginative and well-illustrated volume. This is an essential handbook for any GM planning adventures on airless worlds. With the basics it offers, you can create bases of any size, with all the necessary facilities to make them believable.

Curtis, Anthony R. *Space Almanac.* Woodsboro, Md.: Arcsoft Publishers, 1989 (trade paperback). This massive, 960-page book presents wall-to-wall data on the status of the world's space programs as of the end of 1988. Hardly dated at all, this book also offers wonderful brainstorming ideas for future adventures; I borrowed much of its information for the two-part article on unmanned satellites in POLYHEDRON™ Newszine issues #54-55. How many spacefaring nations and organizations are there now? Where are their launch sites? What are their plans for the future? If you play a modern or near-future campaign, you will find this invaluable. Even the GM of a far-future science-fiction campaign can put this book to work in no time, generating hundreds of scenario ideas from its information-jammed pages.

Heppenheimer, T. A. *Colonies in Space.* New York: Warner Books, 1978 (paperback). One of the basic references on the deep-space colonies popularized by Gerard O'Neill's book, *The High Frontier*, this is a valuable book with many illustrations and photographs. Details on life aboard such a colony are plentiful. It's odd that large deep-space colonies don't figure prominently in adventures. Waterford Publishing's *High Colonies* role playing game is the only game I know of that focuses on them in particular.

Heppenheimer, T. A. *Toward Distant Suns.* New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1980 (trade paperback). Another book on space colonies and the relatively near future of space travel and exploration, this one is also useful for generating scenario ideas for your campaign. It's also well and profusely illustrated.

Joels, Kerry Mark; Gregory P. Kennedy; and David Larkin. *The Space Shuttle Operator's Manual.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1982 (trade paperback). It never hurts to see what the most advanced spacecraft currently available looks like, especially if you are running a near-future game in which the characters might need to fly in an American space shuttle. And do you think a full-sized nostalgic mockup or actual museum-stored spacecraft might appear in some far future scenario? ("Your mission is to find out who stole the shuttle *Atlantis* from the Konstantin Tsiolkowsky Museum of Space Travel, in Earth's L-5 position.")

Oberg, James E., and Alcestis R. Oberg. *Pioneering Space.* New York: McGraw-Hill Books, 1986 (paperback). The terror, power, and glory of space flight are revealed in this remarkable book, which contains extensive quotations and stories from astronauts and cosmonauts. The human angle, missing from so many astronautics books, is given clearly and cleanly. Nearly everything that is discussed in William Pogue's book, which follows, is covered here as well, but more thoroughly and with even more topics thrown in. How could a baby be born in weightlessness, for example? What are the effects of vacuum or radiation on humans? What are the human effects of year-long space missions in weightlessness? What psychological and social problems do cosmonauts and astronauts face, and how do they cope with them? What can you do to relax in space? What happens to a space traveler's family left behind on Earth? What can go wrong—really wrong—on a mission? This book is a gold mine for a game based heavily on character role playing.

O'Neill, Gerard K. *The High Frontier: Human Colonies in Space.* New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1977 (hardback). This, I believe, is generally regarded as the most basic work on the building of deep-space colonies, and it contains much information on the day-to-day life that such colonists might experience. They can choose their own gravity, climate, ecology, and lengths of daytime, for instance. T. A. Heppenheimer's *Colonies in Space* seems to have more detail on the unpleasant side of being in a space colony (collisions with space debris, radiation, etc.), but the two books are both very upbeat about the idea that deep-space "planetless" human societies are the most logical step in colonizing all of space. It makes some sense, but few campaigns utilize this concept in their adventures (see the notes under *Colonies in Space*).

Pogue, William R. *How Do You Go to the Bathroom in Space?* New York: TOR Books, 1985 (trade paperback). The pilot of the American *Skylab 4* space mission answers the title question and a host of others, such as: What does it feel like in space? How do you move, eat, and sleep in zero gravity? What are liftoff and reentry like? How can you recognize symptoms of insanity in a crewmember? How do you handle medical problems in space? What can you see on the Earth from near orbit? What is it like to see deep space? What is it like to return to normal gravity after prolonged weightlessness? This is an easy-to-read book with lots of great stuff for gamers, though the Obergs' *Pioneering Space* has much more information.

What's The View Like?

The impact of a GM's words are much more powerful if he is specific about what the player characters see, hear, feel, smell, and taste on their journey through the universe. This point was made in this column in POLYHEDRON Newszine issue #58, and it cannot be overstressed. Several books are especially useful in giving gamers intense visual images of otherworldly landscapes. Though the views are speculative, the science on which they are founded seems to be strong.

Hartmann, William K., and Ron Miller. *Cycles of Fire: Stars, Galaxies and the Wonder of Deep Space.* New York: Workman Publishing, 1988 (trade paperback). Wow! A sort of sequel to the book that follows, this one provides many beautiful paintings of the surfaces and charms of *really* alien planets! I saw this book and fell in love. If you run any sort of far-future campaign, you

DORA
THE NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMP WHERE MODERN SPACE TECHNOLOGY WAS BORN AND 20,000 PRISONERS DIED
JEAN MICHEL
THE MOON BEAST
ONE OF TODAY'S MOST PROMINENT SCIENCE WRITERS MAKES A PERSUASIVE CASE FOR ESTABLISHING A BASE ON THE MOON.
A truly unique book — Isaac Asimov
HOW DO YOU GO TO THE BATHROOM IN SPACE?
GRAND
GUIDE TO THE SOLA
JOHN BAXTER & THOMAS ATKINS
In Advance of the Lan
Folk Concepts of Outer

have to get this one. If you've ever wanted to describe a fantastic and unique planetscape but couldn't think of anything wild enough, borrow one of these scenes. If a picture is worth a thousand words, you won't have to say much when you haul this book out for the players to see.

Miller, Ron, and William K. Hartmann. *The Grand Tour: A Traveler's Guide to the Solar System*. New York: Workman Publishing, 1981 (trade paperback). Some of the most fantastic color art of the Solar System is displayed in this 192-page book. What would you see from the surface of Venus? Mars? Mercury? Pluto? Io? Miranda? Chiron? Views of titanic valleys, airless landscapes, giant craters, sulfur volcanos, ageless glaciers, red-hot iron asteroids, and the surfaces of disintegrating comets will bring out the sense of wonder in you—and will give you a priceless resource for your imagination.

Murray, Bruce; Michael C. Malin; and Ronald Greeley. *Earthlike Planets*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1981 (trade paperback). You will probably find the text in this book to be hard going, as it is a rather dense treatment of modern comparative planetology, but the book is jammed with black-and-white photos of the surfaces of all of the inner planets except Venus. You'll get a great visual idea of what characters would see if they look down on an airless world, and your verbal descriptions of the terrain should improve greatly. See Elizabeth A. Wood's *Science for the Airplane Passenger*, which follows, for similar stuff.

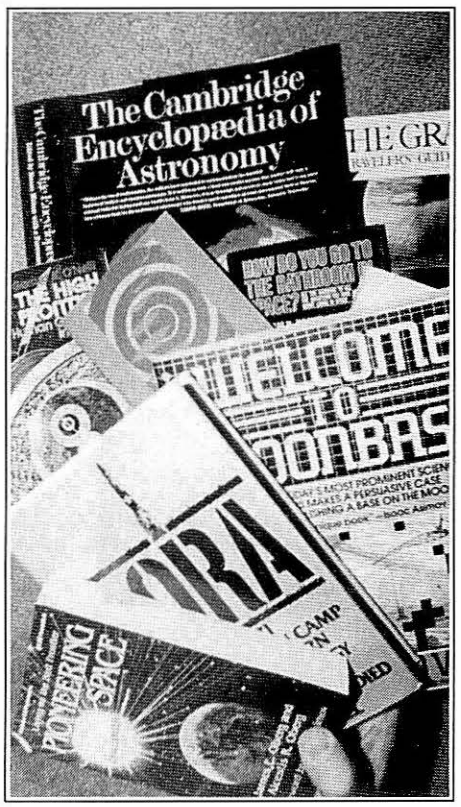
Wood, Elizabeth A. *Science for the Airplane Passenger*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1969 (paperback). What can you see from the window of an aircraft, antigravity vehicle, or low-flying spacecraft? You'll be amazed. The descriptive depth you can add to a scenario as the characters scout out a potential adventuring area is remarkable, and this book gives you all the clues. The aerial appearances of water, buildings, clouds, rainbows, vegetation, rock strata, precipitation, and objects at night (like auroras and landing lights) are well covered. This book was updated in 1975 and may still be available.

The Weird Stuff

Okay, you've had your fill of the basics. Now, what about the weird stuff—the stuff of dreams and nightmares, the stuff that makes player characters scream and causes GMs to emit maniacal laughter, the stuff you remember years later? Here it is. Have fun!

Asimov, Isaac. *A Choice of Catastrophes*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1979 (trade paperback). Boy, oh boy, if you miss this book, you've missed a goodie. I never knew there were so many ways to blow up the world. In his usual entertaining and thorough way, Dr. Asimov details every realistically possible planetary disaster you could imagine, and dozens more besides. You've got your black holes, your antimatter, your exploding suns, cometary impacts, collisions with the Moon, tectonic crises, ice ages, and the collapse of the magnetic field. Then you get to the more immediate stuff, like disease, war, pollution, the loss of resources, the greenhouse effect, and overpopulation. Can you get any good adventuring ideas from all this? You bet. I wish your players luck.

Baxter, John, and Thomas Atkins. *The Fire Came By*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1976 (hardback). On June 30, 1908, something struck central Siberia and blew up. Was it a meteor? An asteroid? A comet? A black hole? An alien spacecraft? This book covers the



facts and theories on this disaster, which has lots of scenario applications in any game. What if the scene were a small colony world, and the blast was caused by a huge crashing starship? The many drawings and photographs, combined with the recreation given of that day's events, are invaluable to a detail-oriented GM.

Cantril, Hadley. *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic.* New York: Harper & Row, 1966 (trade paperback). This book answers the question: If an inhabited planet is invaded by ruthless alien monsters, how will the population react? The effects of the famed Orson Welles radio broadcast of 1938, in which an adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* was mistaken for the real thing, are described here, with many quotes from and anecdotes about people caught in the horror. The applications of this book to any science-fiction game should be obvious to all, and the level of detail given should give the adventure a life of its own.

Corliss, William R. *A Handbook of Astronomical Anomalies.* Glen Arm, Md.: The Sourcebook Project, 1979 (hardback). You'd think something as straightforward as astronomy would lack real mystery. Then how do you explain the many sightings of planets and moons in our solar system, none of which can be found again? Why are funny stripes, spots, lights, and markings sometimes seen on our Moon or on other planets? What are Kordylewski's clouds, and why are they orbiting the Earth? What are the "bright objects" sometimes seen by amateur and professional astronomers, and why should you worry about them? Can a comet wag its tail? Does the sun have an invisible stellar companion? If this sounds like bogus science from the tabloids, it's not. Some of these reports, collected over the centuries by ground and space observers, might not be of use in a campaign, but what you do find will fill you with ideas—if not with a little dread and sense of wonder.

Corliss, William R. *Handbook of Unusual Natural Phenomena.* Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1983 (trade paperback). Another in a series of collections of unexplained natural events, this book covers strange reports from across the world of ball lightning, St. Elmo's fire, bizarre tornadoes, erratic meteors, weird lights in the atmosphere caused by rocket launches, spooklights, giant marine light wheels, mock suns, volcanic sunsets, Brocken specters, Fata Morgana-type mirages, superhailstones, animal "rainfall," unusual effects of earthquakes, giant ocean waves, and atmospheric detonations. Spring some of these marvels on your adventurers when they are scouting out a new planet, and watch the fun.

Curran, Douglas. *In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space.* New York: Abbeville Press, 1985 (trade paperback). What do people *really* think of space travel? The answer might shock you. This 132-page book, jammed with color and black-and-white photographs taken throughout the United States and Canada, documents the images of the rocket and UFO in advertisements, in housing, in art, and in the public mind. Did you ever think that a game scenario about people who worship UFOs or have funny religious ideas about space travel was, well, unrealistic? You won't after you read about the real-life Unarius Foundation, the Adamski UFO encounters, the UFO-summoning "cosmic brain battery," the Aetherius Society, Project Starlight International, the Armageddon Time Ark Base, and many other events and societies. A good GM could make use of this material for designing any number of underground or little-known religions and organizations that will throw futuristic adventurers for a loop.

Michael, Jean. *Dora.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979 (hardback). Can a nation build an advanced space program founded on slave labor, torture, and mass murder? The Nazis did it, as this book graphically details (it is not for the squeamish). Dora was a concentration camp that doubled as a V-1 and V-2 factory; 30,000 inmates died there before the end of World War II. What would spacefaring adventurers do if they found a similar society in the galaxy? What if they were captured by that society and forced to become slave workers at a starport? This is definitely a campaign-level question.

MIT Students System Project. *Project Icarus.* Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1979 (trade paperback). You have 70 weeks to stop a four-billion-ton asteroid from pounding your planet. What do you do? This book is the result of a graduate-level engineering project in 1967, and it offers fascinating ideas to a GM who is toying with a similar scenario. Is a 100-megaton H-bomb good enough to knock the asteroid off course? How fast would you have to build the equivalent of over half a dozen Saturn V rockets to meet your deadline? This book has the answers.

Oberg, James Edward. *New Earths.* Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1981 (hardback). This is a very nice basic primer on terraforming, the process of modifying a world to make it habitable by Earthly life forms, particularly humans. Mars and Venus are seen as the primary targets of such treatment, of course, though attention is also paid to smaller worlds such as the Moon, Mercury, and the four major Jovian satellites. A chapter on the rationales and motivations for terraforming is also given, which GMs would find useful in detailing their more advanced futuristic societies and colonies. I found this book to be jammed with ideas.

A GM who likes to read has already got one foot in the GM's Hall of Fame. See what you can dig up for your campaign, and see what your players think. ❑

Everwinking Eye

Goodbye, Mulmaster

by Ed Greenwood

"So I asked him, 'Why all the hooting and bellowing? And why the full battle armor and the axe? All you face is one rat—and not a very big one, at that. Why all the mithershimmer?'

"And he stood there, hefting that wicked battle axe in his great hairy hands, and he grinned at me. 'Adventure,' he said grandly, teeth gleaming, 'is where you find it.'

"The rat offered no resistance."

Kylae Agundar
My Life With An Adventurer
Year of the Lone Candle

We paused in the midst of a clangour of adventures (that's a bunch, for those not up on the terms of venery—like a 'bother' of officials or a 'thirst' of stirges). So this time we bid adieu to the grim city of Mulmaster with the rest of the adventures Elminster and I have devised (the prying spells of an archmage come in very handy when getting all the facts right).

Here, then, is our final look at adventures in Mulmaster. For maximum tension and excitement (your players may find other names for it!), involve PCs in more than one of these adventures at a time.

The Affair Of The Five Angry Merchants

This adventure can begin whenever the PCs are in or approaching a tavern in Mulmaster at night. Five merchants are seen arguing furiously in low tones. If the PCs eavesdrop, they learn the merchants are arguing over what became of "the special chest" from their caravan which came into the city the previous day. It has gone missing, and each obviously believes that one of the others has stolen it.

Voices rise into shaking fury and attract the attention of a patrol of city soldiers. As the patrol challenges the merchants, the argument is abruptly broken off, and the merchants say the matter is simply a gambling dispute. The merchants quickly leave the scene in separate directions.

If any of the PCs follow a merchant, or whenever they next venture out of the inn or tavern, they will come upon the body of Blunth Dervoul, one of the quarreling merchants. He was stabbed to death. Further, as they examine the body soldiers arrive, and the PCs will have to answer questions—now—or they could find themselves jailed. In the background the PCs spot one or more of the other merchants who were involved in the argument. Any merchant they attempt to speak with will attempt to flee.

The merchants involved in all of this are Harvagh Multrim, a dealer in spices from afar; Methchas Elgonduil, a wine merchant; Jholto Crimmas, purveyor of perfumes imported from Turmish, Tashluta and Calimshan; Ghondrim Elgost, a master carpenter and woodworker; and the unfortunate Blunth Dervoul, a silk-merchant. They are all residents of Mulmaster, and have often sponsored caravans together in the past. The most recent caravan included goods for all of them from the South, purchased through agents in Turmish, Teziir, Sembia, and Westgate. This caravan also carried a "special chest."

Initially known only to the merchants —and the thief who sold it to them—the special chest contained a poison, lhurdas (described on page 66 of *The FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Set Sourcebook*). The five planned to use the lhurdas to slay Hassaglar Ruir, a wealthy moneylender to whom they all owed money.

Hassaglar, a bald, coldly wise, and ruthless individual with a love of treachery, suspected some deceit when five of his debtors neglected to mention the contents and value of a "special chest" to the caravan-guards (several of whom are in the employ of Hassaglar as informers). He approached the weakest of the merchants, Blunth, and pressed him to reveal the secrets of the chest, saying that he knew it concerned him. Hassaglar offered Blunth immunity from reprisals and freedom from his debts to Hassaglar if he would tell all. Blunth confessed, and Hassaglar's informers immediately stole the chest. Hassaglar gave Blunth permanent freedom from his debts by having him slain after the meeting of the five merchants witnessed by the PCs. The wealthy moneylender immediately seized all of Blunth's goods and properties.

The surviving merchants each receive a simple message written on a scrap of parchment and delivered with a vial of lhurdas by copper-a-message street errand-boys. The message reads: "Blunth was the first. This is your share." The merchants immediately hire bodyguards and order them to set upon any armed persons approaching (such as the PCs).

The merchant Ghondrim, made of somewhat sterner stuff than his fellows, also tries to hire adventurers to do away with Hassaglar. Well protected, he will meet with the PCs and offer them 5 gp each for their trouble if they fail to slay Hassaglar within 10 days, and 500 gp each if they succeed—provided that he, Ghondrim, survives to pay it.

Whether the PCs accept his terms, from that moment on Hassaglar's forces will treat the PCs as killers hired by Ghondrim. Further, the other merchants will regard the PCs as hired hands of Ghondrim and/or Hassaglar who are paid to do away with Harvagh, Methchas, and Jholto. These three merchants direct their own hireswords accordingly.

Ghondrim will freely admit the poison plot to the PCs if they ask.

Blunth's body will not be burned for three days. There is no room for burials in Mulmaster; bodies are either burned, or—if there is no chance of disease or poisoning—sometimes sold by the soldiery to pig farmers and others who can make use of cadavers. It will remain in the custody of Mulmaster's soldiers, who will for a fee of 50 gp allow PCs to examine the body (e.g. casting *speak with dead*).

Hassaglar will not be content until all the merchants in the plot are dead. He will try to seize their wealth as he has each one slain. If the PCs become involved in the matter and fight Hassaglar or any of his agents, the moneylender will look for chances to employ the remaining lhurdas against them.

The Silent Affair

Ulgor Jalth, a Blade of Mulmaster, is currently organizing a new group of informants and strike-from-the-shadows

agents (all Blades and many wealthy nobles and merchants have such "midnight men"). Ulgor is certain that key loyalties within his existing group have been subverted by the High Blade. He is right.

This second group of agents, "the Silent," have cost Ulgor far too many gold coins to assemble, and he's instructed them to strengthen themselves (and quietly terrorize the city) by relieving lone individuals and small groups of all items of wealth and magic. This wealth and magic is their pay. The Silent are wise enough not to tackle nobles or Cloaks; they concentrate on visitors to Mulmaster (such as the PCs). The DM should play the Silent like commandos, stalking and robbing the PCs as stealthily as possible, fighting savagely if it comes to battle.

The Silent are 19 in number: seven NE thieves of 3rd to 6th level and 12 CE and NE fighters of 2nd to 9th level, with a variety of magic defenses and weapons won in adventuring and stolen or seized since their arrival in Mulmaster, some of which are distinctive, and are sought by the city soldiery. Soldiers arrest any PCs who end up with the items.

Members of the Silent are loyal to their fellows, and they work well together. They will seek to rescue or avenge any of their fellows who fall afoul of the PCs. If the PCs make themselves enemies of the Silent, warfare will continue between the two groups until one or both are destroyed—regardless of Ulgor Jalth's or the PCs' later activities.

Further Adventures

Any campaign that remains in Mulmaster for any length of time must inevitably drag the PCs into the city's intrigue, and probably into its extensive trade. PCs could well end up hired to escort overland caravans through dangerous territory, or to crew and help defend a merchant ship. In either case, battle with the forces of Mulmaster's main rival, Zhentil Keep, is sure to come.

The intrigue within the city's walls, however, should be hotter than any fray outside. It should be a constant feature of life in Mulmaster that forces PCs to keep moving and scheming—or become victims.

If they grow bored, or if they develop a sense of prudence and a desire for survival, they could find leaving the city a difficult task. Someone could always "confess" to Selfaril or the Cloaks that the slayers of this Blade or that group of Cloaks are the PCs, and an interesting chase could well develop over a great treasure—the player characters' lives.

And so we leave Mulmaster, hopefully with our goods, bodies, and lives all intact! Not a place for the unwary, to be sure. We'll look around other cities on the Moonsea in issues to come. In the meantime, as our ship creaks and groans in the rough chop outside Mulmaster's harbor, let's review the latest news.

Current Clack

* The Black Daggers, a recently-formed guild among the pirates of The Nelanther, has announced that ships of Waterdeep are temporarily immune from attack by its members. Unfortunately for Waterdhavian sailors, this does not include all pirates operating in The Nelanther. This amnesty is a gesture of gratitude to Mirt the Moneylender, widely suspected to be a Lord of Waterdeep.

The fat, wheezing elder, once a Sword Coast ship captain, came out of retirement recently to hunt down and destroy a ship of Luskan crammed with ambitious younger mages and apprentices of the Hosttower of the Arcane. This foul ship, *The Black Basilisk*, had been energetically hunting down pirate vessels, using magic to defeat them, and then plundering the pirates of their treasure —reaching into their minds with Art to uncover the locations of hidden hoards and caches and leads to rivals and other treasures. Then the defeated pirates are transformed into servile undead. The undead ships had begun sailing with the *Basilisk*, in an ever-growing "Dead Fleet," and the remaining pirates had grown truly terrified.

Since Mirt's victory, the Dead Fleet has been scattered, but Sword Coast sailors warn that individual "ghost ships" crewed by undead can still be met anywhere up or down the Coast.

* A wizard somewhere in Cormyr has begun regularly creating and summoning various types of small, dangerous monsters and unleashing them to roam the countryside. In two cases they roamed even the dockside streets and alleys of Suzail itself!

King Azoun and Vangerdahast, his Court Wizard and chief adviser, have thus far remained silent about the monster appearances, but some folk about the Court have heard whispers that it is the work of the evil Zhentarim, seeking to weaken and destabilize the Forest Kingdom. This would let the Zhentarim more easily run their caravans past the troops in The Stonelands, and to make the Forest Kingdom a lesser competitor on the overland trade routes linking The Sea of Fallen Stars and the Sword Coast.

Others say it is the work of a vengeful ex-apprentice of Vangerdahast, a spurned noble lover of Azoun now dabbling in the Art, or even a magically-skilled companion of the outlaw Gondegal who lurks about in the Stormhorns or The Stonelands and seeks to regain the throne of Cormyr.

The most recent—and disquieting—rumor speaks of Thay and Zhentil Keep combining their forces to weaken Cormyr by enlisting the aid of Gondegal's outlaw band as a bodyguard for Thayan and Zhentarim wizards. The wizards are working this monstrous havoc from within Cormyr!

* At the death of a sage of Hillsfar, Arnskaun "the Ancient," thefts of his maps, lore-scrolls, and books have escalated into open warfare in the streets. Folk who dealt with him have long suspected that Arnskaun, an expert on Dragonreach and Moonsea lore, had collected records, papers, and maps of all sorts that revealed the locations of many treasure caches, hidden dowry cellars, and early known dragon lairs in the area.

Rival bands of adventurers and merchants attempted to plunder Arnskaun's lore and succeeded in setting his ramshackle house afire, killing each other at a great rate, and destroying what lore they could not steal.

Where these maps and records are now is unknown, but their new owners are expected to act on them with speed and ready swords.

Arnskaun's colleague, the sage Rorntyl of Mulhessen, believes that Arnskaun knew of at least two important early human treasure hoards: the booty of the outlaw "king" Blaudarr, who robbed three royal treasuries more than 600 summers ago in what is now Calimshan, and much magic and jewelry stolen from Myth Drannor before its fall. These treasures are rumored to be hidden somewhere in Sarbreen (the lost city whose buried streets and deep sewers lie beneath present-day Ravens Bluff. ❑

With Great Power

Grim Realism: Threat or Menace?

by Dale A. Donovan

It all seemed to start about five or so years ago, with characters like the Watchmen, the Dark Knight, and Marvel's own Wolverine and Punisher. As those of you familiar with any of those characters know, I'm referring to the trend of "grim realism" that seems ever-so-present in comics today. Yet, to my knowledge, there has been no published attempt to integrate this trend into superhero gaming. In this column, I'll briefly discuss ways to add this element of today's comic books to your own Marvel campaign.

Good sources to draw from are, of course, the "grim" comics themselves (see the characters listed above). I particularly recommend **The Dark Knight Returns** graphic novel by Frank Miller. Realism isn't exactly a new idea in gaming, as players of any of the cyberpunk genre games will tell you. A thorough reading of any cyberpunk game, especially the sections on background and the game world, will help you get a handle on how a grim game should feel.

Adding Grim Realism

A MARVEL SUPER HEROES game GM who wants to add grim realism to his campaign should decide how to integrate this new element. Will the sudden change to grim realism be too great for the campaign's continuity? Are the players ready and willing for such a change? And how about their PCs? Some heroes, like Captain America for example, just wouldn't feel right in a grim campaign. In many cases, you might be better off starting anew with fresh characters designed for the grim setting.

Several years ago, I wanted to add some realism to my Marvel campaign, and this is how I went about it. One of my villains was an alien sorcerer, and one of the NPC heroines was also an alien—both from the same planet. Civil war erupted on their home planet, and they, plus a few other NPCs, were drawn into the conflict.

Before long, the PC heroes received a magical message from this sorcerer that stated the alien heroine and her human partner had been captured by enemy forces. The sorcerer and his allies were unable to affect their rescue. Would the PCs please come to their aid? After some interesting role-playing, the PCs decided they had to answer the call—even though they knew it could quite possibly be a trap. The sorcerer then magically transported them to his war-torn world.

The PCs then found themselves in a grim setting—an alien world ravaged by war, surrounded by aliens whose true motives were unknown to the heroes.

I won't bore you with any more details, but I hope you noticed how I turned my campaign inside out. I took several elements (in this case NPCs) of my campaign that were already familiar to my heroes, and used these elements to take the PCs, and the campaign itself, in a totally new direction. You can use NPCs as I did, or any GMing device that you can come up with, that fits your campaign as a whole, to do the same.

Another method of transfiguring your campaign has been provided by Marvel Comics itself—the *What If?* story line. Your heroes could be summoned to meet with Uatu, the Watcher. He states that your heroes need to travel to another dimension, (one that resembles the MARVEL UNIVERSE, or your campaign if you don't play on Marvel-Earth). The PC heroes could be "needed" for any number of suitably heroic reasons. The "other dimension" is, of course, your grim campaign setting. Examples of how to pull off this dimension-hopping can be found in current issues of the *What If?* comic, and one great example is in MH-9 *Gates of What If?* by Roger E. Moore, an adventure in an alternate, though not "grim," dimension for the MARVEL SUPER HEROES game.

Karma: To Kill Or Not To Kill?

Now that you have your PCs in the grim setting, one other major area needs to be addressed: death. Death, even in the comics, is grim. You need to decide how you will treat death, and the Karma repercussions of death.

First though, let me state that PC heroes going around killing indiscriminately or killing innocents or those incapable of defending themselves is most emphatically *not* heroic and is certainly not in the tradition of Marvel Comics. Not even Wolverine or the Dark Knight kill indiscriminately. There are a few ways to handle Karma and killing:

* Continue to use Karma as described in the rules. This will, in most cases, keep the level of mortality about the same as in other Marvel campaigns, if that is what you wish. Good role playing though, especially in a grim setting, will sometimes result in a hero giving up his Karma to kill a particularly dastardly foe. In the Born Again story line in the *Daredevil* comic a few years back, the Kingpin of Crime methodically destroys Matt Murdock's life after he discovers that Murdock is Daredevil. If Daredevil had been a PC hero in my campaign, I probably wouldn't have objected if Daredevil had killed Kingpin in retaliation, especially if the PC Daredevil was role played as mentally unhinged as the comic's Daredevil was.

* Use the villain Karma rules (page 20, *Advanced Set* Judge's Book) regarding killing the underlings of "master criminals." PCs would lose 30 Karma points for each henchman, underling, or goon working for the main villain who is killed, instead of all their Karma. After all, the thugs aren't important; it's stopping the villain that's the goal. And, if some goons get in your way, too bad—they probably deserved it anyway. All other normal Karma rules apply, though exceptions, like the Daredevil example above, would still be possible.

* Play the PCs as outright *villains*. Again, this is not recommended, as it's not in the heroic tradition of the comics or the game, but I can see where it might be fun to play your favorite Marvel villain and trash the Avengers or the X-Men. Use all the villain rules in the *Advanced Set* Judge's Book, pages 19-21. These rules are intended to help the GM run his NPC villains, but you can easily apply them to PCs as well. This means that PCs would *gain* Karma for committing crimes, beating up heroes, putting those defeated heroes in deathtraps, etc.

This should be enough to at least get you started on a grim campaign. Remember to study some grim comics and apply suitable elements from them. ❑

Into The Dark

Perchance To Dream

by James Lowder

In the past decade—partly due to the explosion in research about sleep disorders, partly to the developments in special effects technology—genre filmmakers have latched onto the world of dreams as a standard battleground for Good versus Evil. After all, dream sequences allow filmmakers the opportunity to show things far beyond the mundane, to dazzle and awe the audience. This hasn't been confined to fantasy or horror movies, though these genres tend to make the best use of dreaming in their stories.

You can't get any better	*****
Entertaining and enjoyable	****
There are worse films	***
Wait for cable	**
A waste of good tape	*

Dreamscape

1984, 99 Minutes
Thorn/EMI
Director: Joseph Rubin
Cast: Dennis Quaid, Kate Capshaw, Max Von Sydow
*****1/2**

Dreamscape is an uncomplicated little political thriller hidden behind an entertaining soft science-fiction facade. When the president of the United States has nightmares focused on nuclear annihilation and begins disarmament negotiations with the Soviets, a secret branch of the government hatches a plot to destroy him.

Enter Max Von Sydow. His government-sponsored team of researchers has discovered a way for psychically talented people to enter other people's dreams and help them face their nightmares. Their star dream-walker is grifter Alex Gardener (Dennis Quaid), and it isn't long before Alex discovers something isn't right about the project. Could it be that someone has discovered a way to kill people in their dreams? And what does all this have to do with the suave government liaison for the project?

The best parts of *Dreamscape* involve Quaid and his journeys into the dreams of others. The special effects are fair, yet overall they fail to capture the most surrealistic, emotionally-charged aspects of the dreamscape.

The film is packed full of mid-80s nuclear paranoia. The Right Wing secret agency is depicted as the baddie, of course, but no one ever questions their anti-Soviet rhetoric. Given the events of the past year, this seems quite dated and silly. One for the time capsule, I guess.

Nightwish

1989, 87 Minutes
Vidmark
Director: Bruce Cook
Cast: Alisha Das, Jack Starrett
******

Boy, is this a strange film.

As part of an experiment, a number of students are asked to visualize their own deaths in their dreams. Since this doesn't seem to be going so well, the cranky professor (Jack Starrett) sends them off to an abandoned house, where they are to investigate reports of UFOs, poisoned water, and mutant farm animals. Parapsychologists can study just about anything, it seems. It also appears that the director has forgotten completely about the dream-related premise of the film.

You may think you can guess what happens next, but you'll likely be wrong—sort of. As you might expect, the college kids do end up running for their lives in the old dark house. They also discover nefarious doings, oozing mutants, invaders from space, traitors in their own ranks, and a host of other rather odd things. This "old dark house" plot has been done with much more flair in movies like *The Legend of Hell House*, but this film will have you guessing right up until the end.

Give this one a chance to play to that rather cliched end, and you might be pleasantly surprised. For such a low-budget effort, it tries hard to keep you on the edge of your seat. Alisha Das also does a respectable job as Kim, the only one of the college kids with enough sense to brain one of the bad guys when he's not looking.

You could find this odd flick mildly entertaining, but then, just as many of you will be annoyed at its cliches and vague conclusion. Probably depends entirely on your mood.

Project: Nightmare

1985, 75 Minutes
Academy
Director: Donald Jones
Cast: Charles Miller, Seth Foster
1/2

OK, I confess. I fell asleep while watching this absolutely terrible film. Twice.

Being the conscientious reviewer that I am, I did rewind the film to the last point that made sense and started again. Yet, even three cans of caffeine-laden Dr. Pepper could not keep my eyes open through the entire seventy-five minutes at one sitting.

Two hikers are terrorized by strange glowing lights in the sky and recurring dreams (filmed in grainy black & white). After hiking around for miles, they discover that they have stumbled into the test area for Project Touchstone, a governmental operation designed to provide psych tests for astronauts by physically manifesting their dreams and nightmares. The whole project is staffed by one guy (the project's budget was obviously as low as the film's), though he does have a computer very much like HAL from *2001*.

From our heroes' hip sideburns and the clothing they wear, I strongly suspect *Project: Nightmare* was filmed in the late seventies. It isn't all that unusual for video companies to grab older films that were never released, slap some halfway decent art on their boxes, and ship them out as new, direct-to-video films. This is almost always the sign of a sure-fire dog, but you often can't tell you've been duped until you start watching the film and the first pair of bellbottoms appear.

Project: Nightmare also stands as a great example of everything that can be wrong with a dream-related movie. The director uses nonsensical dream sequences to pad the film, and the poor special effects make the sequences tedious and confusing. A character's dreams

take the place of any real personality or development, since the filmmaker expects the audience to figure out the hero is a sensitive guy because he has visions about his dead father.

In the first few moments of *Project: Nightmare*, one of the characters mumbles, "It just doesn't make sense." I should have known he was referring to the movie itself.

A Nightmare On Elm Street

1984, 92 Minutes
New Line/Media Home
Director: Wes Craven
Cast: John Saxon, Heather Langenkamp, Robert Englund
***

From the director who brought you the disturbing *Last House on the Left* and *The Hills Have Eyes* comes a spool of celluloid that has firmly entrenched itself and its monster in the annals of popular culture.

You know the story—not surprising after a handful of sequels, a weekly syndicated TV show, and comic books galore. Fred Krueger was a child murderer who slipped through the fumble-fingered legal system once too often for the parents on Elm Street. They banded together and burned the murderer alive, thinking they'd done their grisly civic duty. Alas, such creatures of evil never go down so easily. Freddie came back, though this time he stalked the kids of Elm Street in their dreams.

Those of you familiar only with the Freddie Krueger of the later entries in the *Elm Street* series might be surprised by the boogyman depicted in Craven's film. He speaks rarely and spouts fewer of the gruesome wisecracks that have become his trademark. Freddie is, in fact, simply a run-of-the-mill psychotic with fingerknives. This makes him a better bad guy, and Craven's film is certainly the only one of the series that comes close to being a true horror film and not just a self-conscious, blood-filled parody of the genre.

The strength of the one girl smart and brave enough to face off against Krueger (Heather Langenkamp) helps the film to succeed, too. She is a match for the dream-killer and a person for whom the audience can cheer. Alas, she is very much unlike the other vapid, mindless teenagers in the film, who wander around their yards in nightshirts like cattle queing up before a slaughterhouse.

Technically the film is below average, with shoddy editing and unbelievably bad dialogue. The cast is mostly sub-par, too; when John Saxon is the most professional guy on the lot, you know you're in trouble. The ending seems tacked on, almost as if the studio decided they wanted to do sequels right away. The film is much more satisfying without it.

For those of you who are tempted to view the film for the second time, watch for Johnny Depp in his first role; as the main character's boyfriend he gets pulled into his mattress after he falls asleep with his headphones on. Also, the movie Heather Langenkamp turns on to try and keep her awake is one of the *Evil Dead* flicks. Good choice.

The success of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series is a bit baffling, especially since this movie is only slightly better than the average gore film. I believe it's the concept itself—a murderer who kills people in their dreams—that has pushed the series along. Changing Freddie into an anti-hero has both furthered the series' success and doomed it to become a self-destructive parody of Craven's original vision.

Dreams

1990, 120 Minutes
Warner
Director: Akira Kurosawa
Cast: Akira Terao, Martin Scorsese
****

Japanese director Akira Kurosawa is one of the most talented storytellers alive today. Whether or not you've seen one of his films, you've certainly seen movies his work has directly influenced —*A Fistful of Dollars*, *The Magnificent Seven*, even *Star Wars*. In *Dreams*, Kurosawa shows us eight short stories drawn from his own dreams. Some are more fragmentary than others, less like stories than visual poems, but all are beautifully filmed and quite interesting.

The best pieces come early in the film. We open with two stories focusing on children, the first about a boy who sneaks into the forest to spy on the foxes' wedding procession, the second about a child who confronts the spirits of a destroyed peach grove. Like much of the film, these dwell on the relationship between man a nature.

The third and forth entries, "The Blizzard" and "The Tunnel," are the highlights of *Dreams*, perhaps because they are the most complete stories. In "The Blizzard," a mountaineer must fight the temptation of death when he and his companions are lost in a storm. "The Tunnel" deals with death, too, as a military commander passes through a tunnel, only to find himself face-to-face with the men who died because of his orders.

"Crows" is the most visually stunning of the dreams. A Japanese artist finds himself pulled into a painting by Van Gogh, then searches for the artist, hoping to gain some insight into his work. What Kurosawa presents for us is a statement about all artists' relationship to nature, partly through the dialogue of Van Gogh (played by director Martin Scorsese) and partly through the stunning use of Van Gogh's paintings as the setting for the story.

The next two stories deal with nuclear annihilation, an unsurprisingly strong theme in Japanese art. "Mount Fuji in Red" and "The Weeping Demon" are interesting enough, but their message about the possible consequences of man's flirtatious relationship with nuclear armageddon is stated too bluntly and a bit too stridently. The theme simply overwhelms the artistry in too many places for either of these to be completely successful.

The same is true to a lesser degree with "Village of the Windmills," the final piece in *Dreams*. Kurosawa relies too heavily upon dialogue to make this tale sum up the rest of the film. In it, a man stops in a village, where he learns that the people there are at peace with the land and with death because they have learned to live without victimizing the earth. It does sum up the film, but you'll find yourself wishing for the plot to hide the message more completely.

Be forewarned that the film is in Japanese, but subtitled in English. It is available on laser disc and even on cassette in letterbox format. Don't let the minor failings of the film or the fact it is not American prevent you from renting it. While not Kurosawa's best, it is definitely head and shoulders above any of the other films reviewed here this month.

Whew, I was beginning to sound like a film instructor there (my past coming back to haunt me). To make up for it, we'll delve into the rather un-academic world of zombie flicks next month.

❑

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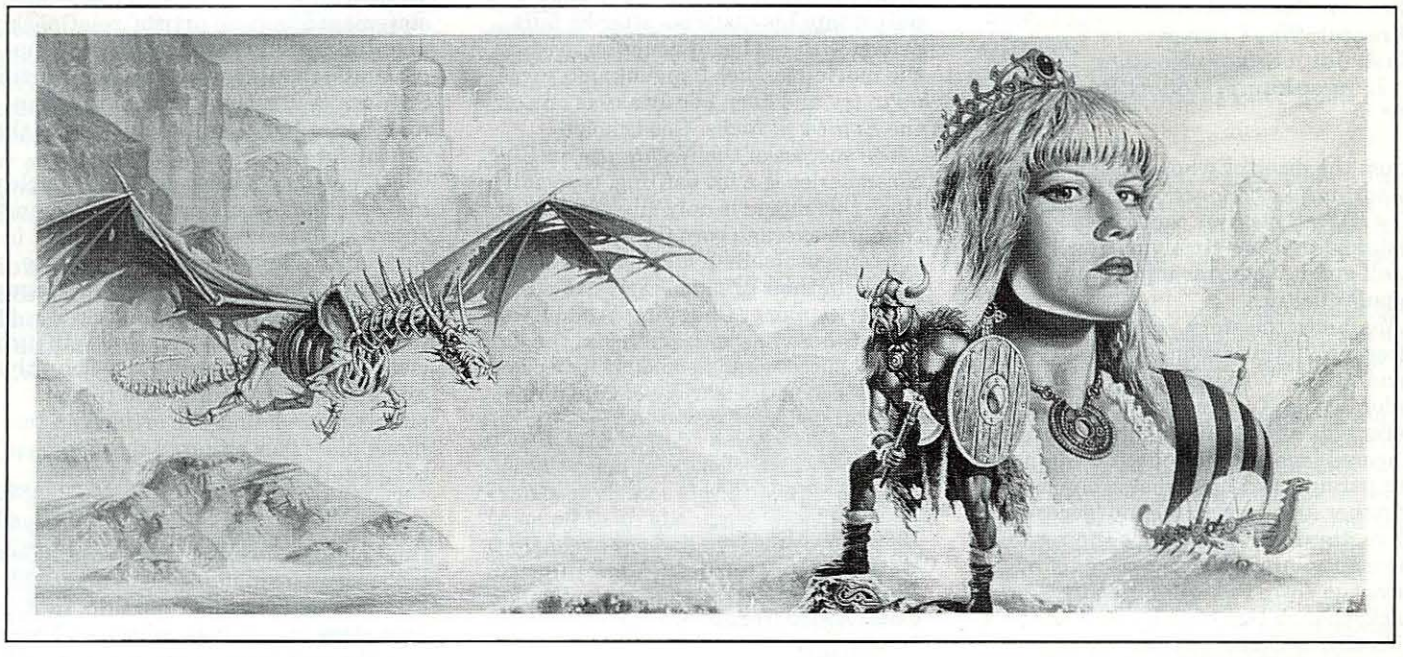

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